

**Aspects of Transgression in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica***

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## Abstract

In a literary era seemingly obsessed with transgression, Valerius' own interest in the theme should come as no surprise. For the Romans, the *Argo* was the first ship in existence; thus the entire Argonautic enterprise is underpinned with transgression. This study sets out to interrogate the complex ways in which Valerius engages with transgression, offering new readings of his *Argonautica* in the process. He presents a world where expected boundaries are tested, or entirely collapsed, and where the characters and the narrator, grasping for something familiar upon which to hold, are left wanting.

This thesis focuses on three major areas of enquiry, all fruitful in making useful conclusions when thinking about transgression in Valerius Flaccus. Firstly, the location of Jason and Medea's wedding on the island of Peuce is examined, a seemingly insignificant departure from Apollonius Rhodius' narrative. In fact, a number of transgressive issues are conflated at the point at which their marriage begins, enhancing the sense of unease at the union. The second section springs from the transgressive nature of Peuce's landscape itself, in that caves, whilst suitable for weddings and sometimes the site of rapes, are often the home of monsters. Monsters pervade the text, appearing at familiar junctures (such as the Harpies, Amycus, and the sown men), but also at unexpected moments, where, for example, gods display monstrous characteristics. The ocular activity of 'real' monsters is shown to foreshadow the same curious phenomenon in Medea herself. She is revealed to be a potentially transgressive character, and in assuming the hybrid role of character in the work and Muse, she is able to step out of the poem into a position of narrative control. The final section considers the technological aspects of Valerius' poem against a background of science fiction receptions of the Argonautic myth, all of which are particularly concerned with exploring ideas of technological advance. Modern science fiction writers such as H. G. Wells and Robert J. Sawyer 'use' Argonautic themes, imagery and motifs in their work to routinely explore the hazards of progress. These modern receptions allow us to revisit the ancient material Valerius' *Argonautica*, and to see that a world without boundaries is not a consequence-free world, since the far-reaching ramifications of technological advance are brought sharply into focus when read through the 'lens' of science fiction.

The *Argonautica*, a poem rich in transgressive themes, is a work which poses more questions than it answers. In that final quality, the significance and potency of its transgression is revealed.

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## Abbreviations

Names of ancient authors and works are abbreviated following the usage of the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* and Liddle & Scott's *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Exceptions to this convention and abbreviations of modern works are listed below.

*OLD* Glare, P. G. W. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1982.

*TLL* *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*. Leipzig: Teubner. 1900-

## Introduction

Valerius Flaccus is the first of the Flavian epic poets. The period in which he lived was one of great change, in that during this time the Julio-Claudian line, members of which had reigned in Rome until the demise of Nero in 68 CE, was replaced by the Flavian dynasty. Following 69 CE, a tumultuous year of conflict known as the ‘Year of the Four Emperors’,<sup>1</sup> Vespasian was finally installed as Emperor, and it is during his reign that Valerius produced his *Argonautica*. Vespasian’s leadership brought a period of calm stability to the Roman Empire. His modesty and unassuming behaviour during sweeping successes in his earlier military career showed him to be the ideal candidate to take Rome forward in this new era, and this led to an increase in Roman power, an accumulation of wealth, and an expansion of the Empire’s administrative borders.

Valerius’ work begins with overt praise for the Emperor and his sons (1.7-21),<sup>2</sup> a stamp of approval for the new regime. Valerius’ *Argonautica* has recently been interpreted both as a paean to the new era,<sup>3</sup> as a pessimistic view of progressivism,<sup>4</sup> and conversely as deflating both arguments for progressivism and primitivism,<sup>5</sup> all viewpoints which in some way seek to historicise the work and to link it explicitly with the new era. The Romans believed that the extent of their power was without limit, a sentiment encapsulated by the phrase *imperium sine fine*. This new era of calm was of course welcome, and there were undoubtedly those who felt a sense of relief that with the installation of a new and stable seat of power, the

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<sup>1</sup> Levick (1999).

<sup>2</sup> See Nauta (2006) for more on the opening of Valerius’ poem.

<sup>3</sup> Stover (2012).

<sup>4</sup> M. Davis (1990).

<sup>5</sup> Zissos (2006b).

Roman Empire could get back to fighting outside enemies rather than enduring the internal fighting which had plagued the administration for so long.

However there were of course still boundaries to Roman power. The sentiment *imperium sine fine* was not a statement of true fact. Geographical limitations or steadfast opposition from enemies of the Roman plan still affected the Empire, whoever was in power. Perhaps this is a contributory factor to the *en vogue* theme of Flavian literature: boundary-breaking, and transgression. Epic poetry of this era deals with issues such as ‘Romanisation’, civil war, gigantomachic themes, the impacts of an accumulation of wealth, history, myth, and anachronisms, and Valerius’ work is no different. The present study sets out to examine a number of transgressive episodes to be found in the epic, to discover whether there may in fact be another way to interpret this retelling of a very old myth, and one which in fact throws the reaction to this new era into some confusion.

For the Romans, the *Argo* was the first ship in existence. This first sea journey was not only pioneering, but also potentially an offence to the gods, since the sea was put in place by them at the time of creation to provide an insurmountable boundary, and to keep humans apart from each other. Once the daring urges of humans overtook the fear of the unknown, these boundaries could be broken. Ironically, the struggle to maintain one’s own territorial boundaries arises once the geographical boundaries, which previously limited human expansion, are broken. For the Romans, the inception of sea travel is conflated with the end of the nomadic, peaceful Golden Age; the harsh realities of the Iron Age follow in its wake, bringing industry, trade, expansion and war.<sup>6</sup> Roman poets such as Catullus (*Carm.* 64) and Horace (*Carm.* 1.3) explore the folly of sea travel, and the latter work in particular

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<sup>6</sup> Feeney (2007, ch. 4).

conflates the invention of navigation with other Iron Age concerns such as agriculture. The Argonautic myth is itself concerned with the breaking of boundaries, but Valerius' work takes this idea further than any other Roman poet whose work survives.

In a literary era seemingly obsessed with transgression, in which the works routinely test boundaries, it should come as no surprise that Valerius should also be interested in exploring these themes in his own poem. In putting pen to paper, Valerius was already challenging what went before, and his plotline innovations may be read as a response to earlier versions of the myth, of which there were many.<sup>7</sup> The story was an enduring one throughout antiquity, and poets and playwrights produced versions of it, or explored individual episodes. Jason and Medea's exploits were also suitable subjects for artistic representations in art. Hesiod (*Th.* 956-62 and 992-1002), Pindar (*Pyth.* 4.70-262), Theocritus (*Idyll* 13 and 22) and a host of tragedians, such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, all detailed versions of or episodes from the myth, while the most familiar version of it was composed by Apollonius Rhodius in his epic poem of four books, *Argonautica*.

In the Roman world, Ennius produced a version of the Medea myth in the form of a tragic play based around Euripides' *Medea*, and Varro Atacinus, a poet of the first century B.C., translated Apollonius Rhodius' poem into Latin, opening it up to an even wider audience. In turn, Apollonius' *Argonautica* was a great influence on Virgil's *Aeneid*.<sup>8</sup> Virgil had hinted at the *Argo*'s importance earlier in his career, in a complex poem which appears to speak of the rebirth of the 'Golden Age'. Here, Virgil says that another Tiphys (the *Argo*'s helmsman) and another *Argo* will demonstrate the cyclical nature of time: *alter erit tum Tiphys et altera quae vehat*

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<sup>7</sup> See Zissos (2008, xvii-xxv) for a useful summary of this.

<sup>8</sup> Nelis (2001).



*Argo* / *delectos heroas* (*Ecl.* 4.34-5).<sup>9</sup> Virgil also seemingly takes a critical swipe at the myth in his next work, *Georgics*: *cui non dictis Hylas* (*G.* 3.6). It seems that in this view, the myth may have been popular to the point of over-saturation. Ovid was also fascinated with Medea, featuring her in *Her.* 6 and 12, and *Met.* 7.1-424, as well as in his own version of the tragedy, now lost. In choosing to rewrite the transgressive Argonautic myth, Valerius had selected to tackle a story so well-known that some considered it to be hackneyed;<sup>10</sup> however it could be argued that in fact the myth had in some ways swung back into vogue with appearance in the Neronian period of the Senecan tragedy *Medea*. Whatever the literary appetites of the time, the nature of the Roman view of the story (i.e. the primacy of the *Argo*) meant that this well-known myth was fertile ground to explore the testing, and breaking, of boundaries.

The present study is concerned not only with the way Valerius presents the more traditionally controversial actions undertaken by the Argonauts, but also how he builds up layers of transgression throughout the text. Valerius' characters seem to display, experience, or encounter transgression in a number of ways. Boundaries which appear in the course of the plot seem to be set, and then tested, merged, or entirely broken, and these factors are a source of intrigue and interest when reading the poem. As discussed above, for the Romans the very mission itself was a boundary-breaker, so arguably anything experienced during the course of that mission might be termed as transgressive. The Roman *Argonautica* utilises and interrogates the transgressive landscape even as it transgresses boundaries to reach it. But we can be even more specific, since Valerius showcases transgression in a more

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<sup>9</sup> See also *Ecl.* 4.34-5, where Virgil demonstrates his knowledge of the Hylas myth by demonstrating that Hercules calls for Hylas when he is lost, and metrically represents the fading of the echo of his name.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see Zissos (2004c), Stover (2010).

pointed and focused way throughout the poem. Transgression of identity is displayed in the story of Peuce, the island upon which Jason and Medea marry. We are given a snapshot of a disturbing story, in which we learn of a nymph named Peuce who is raped by the savage river Hister, and loses her identity to become an island. This is but one of a number of rape narratives which feature in the plot. At times, characters step outside the boundaries of expectation by acting like the opposite gender, or by taking the reins of the poem itself and seemingly directing its path. At others, we see characters challenging what is possible, with gods and humans acting like monsters, creatures which themselves are transgressive in their hybrid status. At other times, humans act like gods, or are able to match them in power. In terms of martial transgressions, the Colchian-Scythian civil war takes place in book 6 between Aeetes and his brother Perses.<sup>11</sup> However perhaps a less straightforward transgressive event is the curious scene in book 3, where the Argonauts mistakenly kill their friends the Doliones as retributive behaviour for a transgression committed against the gods by their king, Cyzicus. Why the Argonauts should suffer is unclear, however this is an interesting and different take on the usual civil war imagery we come to expect in 'Silver Age' Latin literature.

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The first sections of this thesis deal with an event which occurs toward the end of the poem as we have it, examining the plight of Peuce as the location of Jason and Medea's wedding. This is of course the event which formally unites them and which must occur if their tragic future, a future detailed in earlier texts, is to take place. This

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<sup>11</sup> See Buckley (2010).

crucial event in the history of the pair is re-sited by Valerius, in that it no longer takes place at Drepane. The transgressive nature of this landscape itself comes to prominence, a landscape which is new both in regards to its status as setting for this version of the wedding and in that it is presumably being visited by humans for the first time during this story. This factor enhances the dangerous nature of Jason and Medea's union. The island is also foreshadowed throughout the text in critical moments; for example, in Jason's initial wishes for some sort of boundary-breaking technology to carry him across the sea as the epic begins, and in the scenes in which Jason meets Medea for the first time. It is clear that Valerius' decision to move the wedding should not be overlooked: in fact, Peuce constitutes a conflation of transgressions, which point to the island being a suitable location in which Jason and Medea's wedding might take place.

Jason and Medea do not marry in the open on Peuce, but in a cave. Traditionally, caves are suitable locations for weddings in Greek and Roman epic, with Apollonius' Jason and Medea marrying in a cave on Drepane, and Virgil taking influence from this and depicting Aeneas and Dido 'marrying' in a cave, too. Valerius continues this tradition, but there is more to Valerius' scene than imitation. Caves are evocative places in themselves, and are often the home of monsters. Medea's future behaviour, as detailed in tragic representations of her, demonstrate that she is to become a monster herself one day, killing her own children in response to Jason's ambition for higher social status. There may be no hint of monsters living in the cave on Peuce, but a future monster is certainly marrying there.

Sections 3, 4 and 5 develop this idea by looking in detail at the pervasion of monsters into the text, using the cave on the transgressive island of Peuce as a springboard. Monsters are insistent invaders of the poem, and they appear at familiar

junctures (such as the Harpies, Amycus, and the sown men) as well as at unexpected moments. Characters which are not usually deemed monstrous, such as Venus and Juno, take on those qualities in this poem, and this highlights the transgressive nature of the story itself. Monsters turn out to be the very motivation for the Argonautic mission, and the complex interplay between eyes, vision and monsters leads to a close examination of Medea's ocular behaviour when she is finally introduced into the text. Medea is repeatedly represented as usurping the role of important characters such as Erginus the helmsman, lending her a power which enables her to step out of the role of character and into the role of Muse. The absence of the Muse in the initial proem, in which the etymologically intriguing word *mone* is used to invoke Apollo (a deity conflated with the Sun god, from whom Medea is a descendant), also contributes to her intriguing representation in this poem. Medea is potentially transgressive, and this is demonstrated in her witchy qualities coupled with the vulnerability of a human; she commands the respect of the gods, and possesses the eyes of a monster. That she has the inspirational qualities of a Muse further enhances her transgressive nature, as she is effectively a hybrid, able to step out of the poem into a position of narrative control. Monsters and their insistence in this text are a fruitful area of enquiry when assessing the transgressive nature of the *Argonautica*.

The final section considers the technological aspects of Valerius' poem against a background of science fiction receptions of the Argonautic myth, all of which are particularly concerned with exploring ideas of technological advance. The maiden voyage of the 'first ship' has so many ramifications for mankind, and a look at the science fiction genre, which routinely deals with technological firsts and progressivism, is a natural development in this strand of the investigation. A compelling factor of modern science fiction receptions is their repeated association

between Argonautic themes and ideas, and negative outcomes. For example, modern science fiction writers such as H. G. Wells and Robert J. Sawyer ‘use’ Argonautic themes, imagery and motifs in their work to routinely explore the hazards of progress. Transgression is undoubtedly an issue for these later writers, and they explore the folly of human ambition and the hubris of overreaching oneself, by utilising Argonautic references. These receptions are useful in gaining further insight into Valerius’ poem, and generating new readings of it. Science fiction writers have interpreted the Argonauts as boundary-breakers, and their technology and exploits as suitable material to explore controversial themes in their own work and pertaining to their own times. These modern receptions allow us to revisit the ancient material, and to see the transgressive elements in Valerius’ *Argonautica* even more clearly. Any confusion prompted by Valerius’ world without boundaries is transformed into unease when we look back at the text in the light of science fiction receptions of the Argonauts, knowing that their pioneering exploits has such long-term, far-reaching, and ultimately dire consequences. Such a retrospective reading throws into relief the potential negative outcomes of the Argonautic mission, and allows us to begin to question the overtly positive, or indeed non-committal, readings of Valerius’ epic at the time of a new political regime.

Valerius is undoubtedly interested in the ramifications of transgression in this work, and exploring issues such as primacy, technology, landscape, and monsters is productive for drawing useful conclusions. Issues of gender transgression and time also play a part in this study, with Valerius challenging his reader almost at every turn to consider the complex timeline in which his poem manifests itself. Whereas there are those who suggest that Valerius is using the Argonautic mission to overtly support the Flavian regime, others argue that no such ideological viewpoint exists. It

is the argument of this thesis that through the repeated use of boundaries and transgression, Valerius is exploring the idea that the world is not so clear-cut. The repeated testing of boundaries, removal of them altogether, examination of hybridity, and merging of characteristics of usually separate identities, forces us to look at the confused world in which Valerius' Argonauts live, and by extension, to consider how this reflects on the world around the poet himself. The formula relies on two elements: the boundary must be clearly and evidently set up, and it must subsequently lose outright its integrity, or have that challenged. Modern science fiction writers use Argonautic themes to showcase the folly of technological advance, a viewpoint which further challenges any positive interpretations of Valerius' *Argonautica*.

The Roman tenet *imperium sine fine*, power without bounds, is a paradox. Valerius is painfully aware of this, and by showing the fragile nature of boundaries in his work by repeatedly utilising the language and themes of transgression, he is negotiating a careful middle-ground between positivity and negativity. He is simultaneously vaunting the joy and hope of a new principate, a regime which much be supported simply by literary convention, while hinting at the old (or perhaps new) anxieties which go along side it. This ambiguousness and duality is inherent in Valerius' text as we read these transgressions, and thus we can see that while the new principate is being hailed (expectedly) on the one hand, the undercurrents of warning are also in evidence.

## 1: The ‘mysterious island’ of Peuce

The whole of Jason and Medea’s future, famously documented in a number of tragic plays (of which only those of Euripides and Seneca survive), hangs on the fact that they marry. Their wedding formally unites them in their transgression, and narration of the formalisation of their relationship is necessary to facilitate the arguably more famous accounts of their subsequent tragic separation. The wedding scene is therefore a very important one to the overall story of these characters.<sup>1</sup> The only surviving accounts of the wedding scene appears in the *Argonauticas* of Apollonius and Valerius, and since each poem is essentially telling the same core story, similarities between them are to be expected.<sup>2</sup> Apollonius’ version is relatively straightforward: the pair wed under duress in a cave on an island called Drepane, as they flee from the Colchians, having snatched the Fleece (AR 4.1128-1152). This sequence of events and island location largely correspond with Valerius’ account (8.215-58). However in Valerius, Jason and Medea wed by choice in a cave on different island, Peuce, which is situated in the mouth of the river Danube.

Peuce, like Drepane, for one reason or another has been represented as peripheral.<sup>3</sup> It could be suggested that Valerius has simply included a plot divergence<sup>4</sup> from the Apollonian sequence of events; an act of assertion and perhaps even poetic transgression. However such a stance might encourage us to simply take

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<sup>1</sup> Monaghan (2005, 20-1) discusses causation as a theme in Herodotus (1.4.2) and Valerius, with ‘shift in world power’ beginning with the abduction of Medea, with the poem’s cessation after their wedding suspending the action at a moment before Rome can be founded. On rape in Herodotus, see Walcot (1978) and Harrison (1997). Note that the Argonauts ponder the wider implications of their actions by discussing strife between Europe and Asia (8.395-9). See also M. Davis (1990).

<sup>2</sup> On the similarities between the texts in general, see Garson (1965, 104).

<sup>3</sup> Homer, in his introduction to the island of Scheria, gives us the following information (*Od.* 6.7-8): ἔνθεν ἀναστήσας ἄγε Ναυσίθοος θεοειδής, εἴσεν δὲ Σχερίη, ἑκάς ἀνδρῶν ἀλφηστᾶων ‘so godlike Nausithous having rose up, led his people and settled them in Scheria, far away from toiling men’. Colchis is on the edge of the Roman Empire; for more on this, see Braund (1994, 171-204).

<sup>4</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, chapter 4 especially) for a summary of some plot divergences (or to use Hershkowitz’ term: digressions).

the Valerian wedding scene at face value, and move on,<sup>5</sup> whereas the island of Peuce demands further attention. Ultimately, in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* all roads lead to Peuce, with several transgressive ideas converging on this site in book 8 of the poem. Therefore, this study starts with the end of the book, as a way of opening up ways to understand transgression for this episode, and beyond.

Valerius makes some important changes to the wedding scene as it is presented in Apollonius. A troubling story provides the backdrop to the wedding ceremony, and reveals the convergence of a number of transgressive elements at the very moment that Jason and Medea's married life begins, and a confusing loss of the integrity of usual boundaries. The landscape is particularly troublesome in this location, in that we learn the island upon which they marry was once seemingly a nymph, but after suffering a sexual violation (another transgression),<sup>6</sup> she loses her identity, somehow *becoming* the island, perhaps as a result of her ordeal. Furthermore, the couple marry in a cave, often the site of weddings in literature but often also the home of monsters, another link to transgression in terms of the hybridity of their form. Monsters appear in the narrative throughout, and contribute to the repeated foreshadowing of the events on Peuce which take place during the course of the poem. The events on Peuce combine to produce a bewildering picture of collapsed boundaries, and constitute a microcosm of the boundary-free world which Valerius constructs in his poem. Furthermore, they provide a springboard to the study of other transgressive episodes and characters in the poem.

It is not possible to look at the wedding scene in Valerius without comparing it to the way in which Apollonius deals with it, and how the two accounts may be

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, in discussion at a panel on Flavian Epic poetry at the Celtic Conference at Edinburgh in 2010, the island of Peuce was dismissed by one scholar as 'unimportant'.

<sup>6</sup> 'Roman rape is one of Rome's central cultural stories [...] One of the favourite themes for school rhetorical exercises and after-dinner debates was rape and its punishment' (Beard 1999, 10). Murgatroyd (2005, 63) on rapes appearing at significant points in the *Fasti*.



linked. Valerius' decision to stage the wedding in a different place to Apollonius highlights this scene and invites us to compare and contrast it with the wedding scene as it is presented in Apollonius.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, we are also compelled to consider the implications of the fact that in Valerius, Jason and Medea have the *choice* to marry when and where they do, rather than being forced to marry under duress, as they are in Apollonius. Valerius' intertextual relationship with a range of earlier poets, including Apollonius, will be explored in the first part of this section, since intertextuality between Valerius' poem and earlier texts elucidates what is happening as Jason marries Medea, and helps us to understand the significance of that event. The description of Peuce in the light of the Apollonian wedding location, Drepane, will be considered, as well as the brief mention of Peuce made by Apollonius. There is also a complex interplay of timelines to be considered here, in that Apollonius' cave on Drepane undoubtedly influenced Virgil in his 'marriage' of Aeneas and Dido in book 4 of the *Aeneid*.<sup>8</sup> Once these issues have been explored, and taking its cue from the cave setting, the investigation will be widened to explore other issues which Peuce raises, such as the prevalence of monsters and other types of hybrid in the text.

It would be easy to assume that the island of Peuce is unimportant; however this is far from being the case. In fact the mysterious and troubling island of Peuce is an ideal and significant venue for the wedding of Jason and Medea – a venue which highlights the transgressive nature of their union, and which, for the reasons noted above, serves as an ideal jumping-off point for this study into transgression.

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<sup>7</sup> On the various locations for the wedding in earlier literature, see Dyck (1989, 464-5).

<sup>8</sup> See Nelis (2001, especially 49-65), on this issue in his investigation of the links between Virgil's *Aeneid* and Apollonius' *Argonautica*. He argues that 'Carthage [...] is modelled primarily on Colchis, while Apollonius' Phaeacian Drepane, along with Homer's Phaeacian Scheria, also contributes to Virgil's Libyan narrative' (ibid. 25). Note also that Drepanum in Sicily is the location in which Aeneas loses his father Anchises. See Servius' introductory comments on *Aeneid* 4.

### 1.1 The wedding of Jason and Medea: Apollonius Rhodius

The dissolution of Jason and Medea's marriage is arguably more well-known than the ratification of it, with Euripides' *Medea*, for example, telling the couple's famously harrowing and highly emotive later story once they have retrieved the Fleece and set up home in Corinth. It seems that while their separation and the subsequent fallout were thoroughly covered by authors and dramatists in antiquity, their actual wedding appears not to have been afforded such focus (at least, that is the case in the texts which have survived). Since the ending of Jason and Medea's union has such significance, it is natural that we should consider its beginning, as given in Apollonius and Valerius. In order to provide a baseline for comparison when thinking about transgression, it is necessary to begin by looking at Apollonius' version.

The Jason and Medea in Apollonius wed in the kingdom of Phaeacia (AR 4.983-1169), here given its ancient name of Drepane.<sup>9</sup> In Homer, the island is known as Scheria (*Od.* 6.8),<sup>10</sup> while we associate it with modern Corfu.<sup>11</sup> Apollonius' narrator tells us the story of Jason and Medea's wedding on Drepane (AR 4.983-1169). At this point in the plot, Medea has already helped Jason to retrieve the Fleece, and together with the Argonauts they are making their arduous return journey back to Iolchos. The stops made by the Argonauts detailed in Apollonius' epic initially closely resemble Odysseus' journey prior to his arrival home, with both myths detailing a sojourn in the kingdom of the Phaeacians. In the timeline of

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<sup>9</sup> Hunter (1993, 73) sees the Apollonian wedding as owing to poetic accounts of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis in the cave of Cheiron on Pelion. This scene is evoked in the ecphrasis of the *Argo* itself (1.130-48, on which see Zissos (2008, 155-67). Hershkowitz (1998b, 213) discusses the comparisons between the wedding scene in Apollonius and Valerius.

<sup>10</sup> Hunter (1993, 68) points out that the kingdom was, for Odysseus, 'a kind of half-way house between the fantasy world of his adventures and the realities of home'.

<sup>11</sup> See below for discussion of the island location used by Apollonius.

mythical events, Jason and the Argonauts of course reach Drepane before Odysseus does. The *Argo*'s fame is in fact noted in the *Odyssey*: οἷη δὴ κείνη γε παρέπλω ποντοπόρος νηῦς,<sup>12</sup> Ἀργὼ πᾶσι μέλουσα, παρ' Αἰήταο πλέουσα ('One alone among seagoing ships did indeed sail past on her way home from Aeetes' kingdom – this was *Argo*, whose name is on all men's tongues', *Od.* 12.70-1, trans. Shewring).<sup>12</sup> Apollonius seizes this opportunity and no longer lets the *Argo* simply sail past the island as it did in the Homeric epic.

Whereas Odysseus' journey is reaching its closing stages when he arrives at the kingdom of the Phaeacians, the Apollonian Argonauts must continue their voyage once they have left the island.<sup>13</sup> Just as Odysseus will do, the intrepid band encounters king Alcinous and his queen Arete<sup>14</sup> and as they are welcomed, the Argonauts rejoice as if they had actually reached Thessaly (AR 4.993-1000). It is at this moment of celebration that the pursuing Colchians arrive, intent on taking Medea back to her fatherland (AR 4.1000-1007). A terrified Medea supplicates Arete that she should not be sent back to her father (AR 4.1014-28),<sup>15</sup> and to bolster this argument the maiden then approaches each of the Argonauts in turn (AR 4.1031-52), reminding them of her pivotal role in obtaining the Fleece and in helping them escape, and begs them to defend her. Arete takes up the case with her husband as they lie in bed later that night (AR 4.1068-95), and Alcinous warns against challenging Aeetes despite his distance from their kingdom, airing concerns that Aeetes might wage war against the Phaeacians if they were to aid Medea in her

<sup>12</sup> In addition, a genealogy of Pelias is given at *Od.* 11.254-9; Aeetes is mentioned at *Od.* 10.137; and a son of Jason and Hysipyle is mentioned at *Il.* 7.468-9, 21.40-1 and 23.746.7.

<sup>13</sup> Hunter (1993, 68) argues that Homer is invoked at this point in the Hellenistic epic to 'mark the difference' in fortunes experienced by Odysseus and by the Argonauts.

<sup>14</sup> See Hunter (1993, 69) on the contrast between Jason and Medea and the 'normality' of Alcinous and Arete, and the potential relationship between Odysseus and Nausicaa. See below for discussion of links Medea and Nausicaa and Virgil's Dido.

<sup>15</sup> See Hunter (1993, 68-70) on correspondences between Apollonian Medea and Nausicaa: 'That Medea is already implicated in the murder of her own brother and will go on to kill her own children is an irony that the poet does not need to belabour' (ibid., 70).

plight (AR 4.1098-1105). He decrees that if Medea is still a virgin, she should be returned to her father (AR 4.1106-9).<sup>16</sup> Arete, knowing that Medea is a *parthenos*<sup>17</sup> and by rights, should not have been taken from the care of her father in her unmarried state without his consent, hastily arranges for the pair to be married (AR 4.1110-27), and the wedding takes place in a cave which subsequently became home to Macris, a goddess who, as the narrator explains, nurtured Dionysus when he was expelled from Olympus as a baby (AR 4.1128-1152). We are then told that the place has since been linked with Medea's name: κεῖνο καὶ εἰσέτι νῦν ἱερὸν κληίζεται ἄντρον Μηδείης, ('To this day that holy cave is called Medea's cave', AR 4.1153-4, trans. Race). The wedding is a significant event in the poem, as Apollonius allots 186 lines of text to it.

In some respects, Apollonius' narrator represents Jason and Medea as being in love,<sup>18</sup> but whatever the status of their relationship, we are left in no doubt that their nuptials take place hurriedly:

οὐ μὲν ἐν Ἀλκινόοιο γάμον μενέαινε τελέσσαι  
 ἥρως Αἰσονίδης, μεγάροις δ' ἐνὶ πατρὸς ἐοῖο,  
 νοστήσας ἐς Ἰωλκὸν ὑπότροπος· ὥς δὲ καὶ αὐτὴ  
 Μήδεια φρονέεσκε· τότε αὖ χρεὼ ἤγε μιγῆναι.

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<sup>16</sup> Garrison (2000, 233) points out that under Athenian law, a rapist was seen to be a thief who has in fact robbed the girl's father of a potential aid to his allegiance and finances. For a Roman point of view, see Dixon (2001, 47) on Livy's narration of the rape of Verginia (*Ab Urbe Condita*, 3.44-8): 'The purity of a woman's body could thus be a sign for the purity, safety or political autonomy of the group'.

<sup>17</sup> On the *parthenos*, see Deacy (1997).

<sup>18</sup> Though note the comments, for example, of Dyck (1989, 457): 'What had started out as a love-match begins to approximate a marriage of convenience, and this, too, it hardly needs saying, is a development in the direction of the domestic situation at Corinth' (i.e. as represented famously in Euripides' *Medea*).

(‘Yet it was not in Alcinous’ domain that Jason, Aeson’s heroic son, had wanted to celebrate his wedding, but in his father’s halls after returning to Iolchos; and Medea herself also had the same intention, but Necessity led them to make love at that time’, AR 4.1160-4 (Trans. Race))

Their future plans dashed by the onslaught of the pursuing Colchians and by Alcinous’ threats to return Medea to her father due to her status as *parthenos*, they must wed in this location. Following their rushed marriage, which takes on an air of breathlessness despite the guiding hand of Queen Arete, Medea is legitimately able to remain with her new husband. Now the Argonauts must continue their journey back to Iolchos, with the pursuing Colchians not yet defeated, but with the possibility of any legal claims for her return now nullified by the union.

## **1.2 She’s leaving home: Medea’s flight and the geography of Peuce**

Valerius’ representation of Jason and Medea’s courtship is very different, though the tale as it is told by Valerius (or indeed, anyone) needs to retain a number of elements so that it still is an *Argonautica* and not something else.<sup>19</sup> As in Apollonius, Jason and Medea wed only once the Fleece has been recovered from Colchis and the attraction between them is obvious, notwithstanding the intervention of the goddesses in the establishment of this attraction.<sup>20</sup> For Valerius to have omitted the wedding would leave Valerius’ version of events out of step with the representations

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<sup>19</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b) on divergences.

<sup>20</sup> See chapters 4.1, 4.2, and 5.5 on the monstrous interventions of Juno and Venus in Valerius.

of the couple's later married life, as shown in the tragic plays of Euripides, Seneca and Ovid (now lost), for example. This is even more important given the fact that Medea's tragic future is hinted at repeatedly throughout the poem.<sup>21</sup> Equally, it would have been absurd for Valerius to bring the wedding forward and hold it on Colchis, for example, or to show Aeetes giving his blessing to the couple. Such actions would radically alter the tone of the work and drastically limit what the poet could do with the characters as the poem progressed, with any sense of intrigue, suspense or drama of the chase now removed.

Valerius marks out the wedding scene as his own by introducing significant changes from Apollonius' version, and it is these changes which need to be explored in the context of transgression, in order to demonstrate that not only is Valerius' poem different in the way in which the important event of Jason's wedding to Medea takes place, but also to begin to understand the number of ways in which transgressive elements concatenate at Peuce. Differences to Apollonius' version of the Argonautic myth become clear as soon as the Argonauts leave Colchis, since the poet reorganises events after the retrieval of the Fleece, and his narrator makes short shrift of their escape and embarkation.<sup>22</sup> The Argonauts are in fact still in Scythia when the helmsman Erginus announces that they should not try to pass the Clashing Rocks once again, fearing the danger involved in trying to do so. Erginus announces that they should instead complete a large part of their return journey to Greece by navigating the river Hister, that is, the modern Danube.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See for example Mopsus' prophecies (1.224-6 and 8.247-51), and Medea's own visions (5.329-40 and 7.249-50).

<sup>22</sup> See Herschkowitz (1998b, 207-18) on Valerius' 'compression' of events after leaving Colchis, as given in Apollonius.

<sup>23</sup> See chapter 5.4 on this scene and the connections between the helmsman and Medea.

*mutandum, o socii, nobis iter: altera Ponti*  
*eluctanda uia et cursu quem fabor eundum est.*  
*haud procul hinc ingens Scythici ruit exitus Histri,*  
*fundere non uno tantum quem flumina cornu*  
*accipimus. septem exit aquis, septem ostia pandit.*  
*illius aduersi nunc ora petamus et undam*<sup>24</sup>  
*quae latus in laeuum ponti cadit; inde sequemur*  
*ipsius amnis iter donec nos flumine certo*  
*perferat inque aliud reddat mare.*

('Friends, we must change our route; and we must journey on another toilsome highway of the sea and a course which I will tell you. Not far from here the huge Scythian Hister estuary empties out, who we hear pours out from his rivers not by one horn; he exits by seven channels, he opens out seven mouths. Let us now seek those mouths facing us, and the wave which falls into the left side of the left hand sea; then we shall follow the river's course itself, until it carries us with sure stream and returns us on another sea', 8.183-91).<sup>25</sup>

As the narrator explains (8.195-6), no such danger exists; Erginus is ignorant of the fact that the Clashing Rocks are already destined by the gods to remain forever fixed now that they have been breached and successfully passed. However, Erginus' misguided advice affords the Argonauts new opportunities in terms of the plot:

<sup>24</sup> For *unda* = 'the sea', or a body of water, see *OLD* s.v. 1b, 2.

<sup>25</sup> See Spaltenstein (2005, 425-6). See below for more on Medea's involvement with Erginus.

firstly, they must now travel home along unknown routes, which would perhaps have enabled Valerius to build into his poem a number of further innovations to add spice to the remainder of the tale. The second, and more significant opportunity for our purposes, is that this course of action enables the Argonauts to pass the island of Peuce, which lies in the Danube delta. Had Erginus not been so very cautious in planning their return journey following the untimely death of Tiphys, the *Argo* may have taken a detour away from Peuce, and the opportunity to exploit the island's troubling mythological history would have been lost. Here, our interest has been piqued: this version is taking a markedly different turn to events as they occur in Apollonius.

Having now snatched the Fleece, the text moves apace (8.202-3),<sup>26</sup> perhaps reflecting the speed at which the Argonauts must flee from the outraged Colchians. This rapidity might also reflect the progress of the couple's relationship at this stage. In Apollonius, the pair have the duration of their arduous journey around Europe in which to get to know each other better before they wed.<sup>27</sup> This is certainly not the case in the Roman epic. Nor do the Argonauts reach (or even come close to) Drepane in Valerius, thus the inclusion of the Phaeacians (at this stage, at any rate) is immediately ruled out, and there is no opportunity for Medea to beseech anyone for assistance in marrying Jason. In Valerius, the wedding is in fact mentioned while the *Argo* is still comparatively close to Medea's homeland – they are certainly nearer her home than that of the Argonauts. While hints of conjugal rites do appear in the text,<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 427-8).

<sup>27</sup> See Phinney (1967, 328) who argues that 'Medea did love Jason, but because by loving him she had shown herself faithless to her father, Aeetes, and to Apsyrtus, her brother, she was filled with such fear of her powerful and violent father that she could not enjoy the full pleasure of her betrothal and marriage.'

<sup>28</sup> See for example 5.219f, *infandaque natae / foedera*, where the 'unspeakable pact' may be foreshadowing the marriage-contract. When they first meet, Jason's opening gambit is to praise the fate of Medea's future husband: *olimque beatior ille, / qui tulerit longis et te sibi iunxerit annis* (5.383f). Later Juno decides to 'ally' Medea with Jason, and uses the verb *coniungo*, (*OLD* 1b = 'to



when consideration of the conjugal rites comes in the case of the characters themselves, it is not done at any length. Initially Venus, disguised as Circe, encourages Medea to fall for Jason by listing a number of married *exempla* for her to follow (7.223-34).<sup>29</sup> She then goes on to tell Medea that she has spoken to a suicidal Jason, and that he has begged her to take Medea a message. ‘He’ says:

*‘ei mihi, quod nullas hic possum exsoluere grates!  
ac tamen hoc saeua corpus de morte receptum,  
hanc animam sciat esse suam’.*

(‘Alas, that I am able to give no words of gratitude. And yet,  
let her know that this body, saved from cruel death, this soul,  
is hers’, 7.276-8)<sup>30</sup>

These words are not Jason’s; they come from Venus. Despite this, they do introduce the idea of Jason and Medea’s union into our consciousness. Jason has already referred to Medea as his wife (*coniunx*, 5.497) which is explicit anticipation of Medea’s wife-status, but we are given no details of any planning of their nuptials. Perhaps it is enough to know that in Apollonius, the pair eventually marry; as yet, there is no reason to question how Valerius will deal with this important scene. Jason later informs Medea that after she has helped him defeat her father’s trials, he will

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unite sexually’, 3 = ‘(mil.) To join (parties of men) into a single force, unite (forces): *Ergo opibus magicis et uirginitate tremendam / Iuno duci sociam coniungere quaerit Achiuo* (6.449-50). See below for more on this passage.

<sup>29</sup> See Stover (2011) on these *exempla*, and chapter 5.5 for more on Venus’ behaviour here.

<sup>30</sup> See Spaltenstein (2005, 276-8).

not abandon her (7.490-508), but here reverts to referring to her as *uirgo*.<sup>31</sup> Medea bids farewell to her virginity (8.6) in the aftermath of what has happened; Jason then reassures Medea of his feelings for her (8.37-43), and they go on to retrieve the Fleece. Prior to the event itself, a concrete hint of wedlock in the Roman text comes in the doubts expressed by Medea, as she sits high in the poop of the *Argo* as it flees her homeland. She is still upset about her current situation and the terrible things she has done:

*atque ibi deiecta residens in lumina palla  
flebat adhuc, quamquam Haemoniis cum regibus iret,  
sola tamen nec coniugii secura futuri.*

(‘And there, sitting with her robe pulled over her eyes, she was still crying: although she travelled with the Haemonian kings, she was still alone, and she was not confident of the future union’, 8.204-6).<sup>32</sup>

In this moment of foreshadowing, the stance that Medea has adopted, i.e. covering her face, might suggest that transgressive activity has taken place, since it hints that Medea is feeling ashamed of her actions. The discourse of shame is often present when texts deal with rape and abduction,<sup>33</sup> and as such Medea’s feelings as expressed through her clothing are perhaps to be expected: she has, in the eyes of her

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<sup>31</sup> See Stadler (1993, 189-94) and Spaltenstein (2005, 337-42). See Dickey (2002) on Jason’s word for Medea: *uirgo*. I do not concur with Mozley’s translation of ‘wife’ here.

<sup>32</sup> See Spaltenstein (2005, 428). Note that immediately after this scene, the narrator explains: *illam Sarmatici miserantur litora ponti, / templa Thoanteae transit defleta Dianae. / nulla palus, nullus Scythiae non maeret euntem / amnis*. (‘The shorelines of the Sarmatian Sea pity her, she provokes the tears at the temple of Thoantean Diana. No lake, no river of Scythia but mourns for her as she passes’, 8.207-10).

<sup>33</sup> Scafuro (1990, 148-9).

compatriots, been ‘abducted’.<sup>34</sup> We can assume that at some point Jason has made his intentions clear to Medea, since she knows that marriage to Jason is in her future, but she is still unsure about it. Furthermore the Colchian is tortured by her actions towards her homeland and family, and despite what she has undoubtedly helped the Argonauts to achieve, she still feels a sense of isolation from them.

The differences between Apollonius’ version of the story at this point and those given by Valerius continue. Here, there is no room for Medea’s new shipmates to agonise about her change in status: indeed we are told that the Argonauts have become more comfortable with her presence: *ipsi quoque murmura ponunt / iam Minyae, iam ferre uolunt* (‘also the Argonauts themselves now cease their murmuring, and now are willing to take her’, 8.211-2),<sup>35</sup> though as we have seen, they are leaving her well alone. Nor does Jason himself offer Medea a consolatory shoulder, seeming quite oblivious to her suffering. In fact, he is already in a celebratory mood: *uix alleuat ora / ad seras, siquando, dapes, quas carus Iason / ipse dabat*, (‘scarcely does she lift her face to speak, if at all, at the feasts which her dear Jason himself was now giving’, 8.212-4). Jason continues to show a lack of tact as he commentates on the lands they are passing: *iam nubiferam transire Carambin / significans, iam*<sup>36</sup> *regna Lyci* (‘now pointing out that they are passing cloudy

<sup>34</sup> See Pavlou (2009, 193) on Medea’s clothing, her liminality and progress to an evil force in Apollonius: ‘For as long as she wears her veil, or at least covers her head and/or eyes with a certain *apoptygma* of her *peplos*, she appears to be constrained by a certain kind of *aidos*. This *aidos* gradually recedes and, in the Talos episode, Medea is presented as no longer having any control over her ‘darker’ side.’ (ibid. 201). As Medea veils her eyes with her cloak in Valerius, she is sitting in a place of power on board a ship, the poop deck: *puppe procul summa uigilis post terga magistri / haeserat auratae genibus Medea Mineruae* (‘Far away in the summit of the poop behind the vigilant helmsman’s back, Medea had clung to the knees of golden Minerva’, 8.202-3; see chapter 5.4). There is tension between these outward displays and the *location* in which she makes them: she is seated apart from her husband-to-be, behind the helmsman in a place of control and influence.

<sup>35</sup> See Zissos (1999b) on negative allusion and Valerius’ complex appropriation of earlier models: Zissos argues that a knowledge of Apollonius is required here in order to fully understand the story and to complete the ‘gaps’ Valerius leaves, since the Apollonian Argonauts were dissatisfied with her leaving with them.

<sup>36</sup> Note the repetition of the word *iam* in these six lines (8.211-5): by doing this Valerius depicts the sense of the *Argo* at full speed here, increasing the pathos of Jason and Medea’s truncated courtship.

Carambis, now the kingdom of Lycus', 8.214-5); insensitively, he then tries to 'cheer' her by pretending that they are already approaching *his* homeland: *totiensque gementem*<sup>37</sup> / *fallit ad Haemonios hortatus surgere montes* ('and he so often deceives her, having encouraged her, as she groans, to stand up and see the 'Thessalian' mountains', 8.214-6).<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact that the Apollonian Jason and Medea were in flight from the Colchians, they were nevertheless afforded the opportunity of building a relationship over this time and becoming familiar with one another's qualities, foibles, interests, and dislikes as they undertook their journey around Europe. Valerius' depiction is in stark contrast to this, as he shows the pair enjoying a markedly swift courtship, punctuated by Medea's deep despair and Jason's imperceptiveness, rather than the curiosity and excitement which might usually accompany a new relationship. This situation might be seen as far from ideal, and it is in the midst of this brief and rather lacklustre experience (for Medea) that Valerius suddenly introduces us to Peuce, the island upon which Jason and Medea will decide, by choice, to marry.

For all the haste that we have seen Valerius demonstrate in sections of this part of the story, and following the description of the contrasting attitudes and emotions of the couple in the lead-up to their union, the poet now pauses to give us further information about his chosen location for the wedding. This brief change of scene and tone grants the opportunity to assess the importance of the location, and the narrator's return to Peuce's story again a little later reinforces this significance.<sup>39</sup> Initially, the scene is set with a short prologue to the island of Peuce:<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Aeneas' groans after his final heated exchanges with Dido (*Aen.* 4.393-6). Aeneas wants to help Dido, but cannot, and accompanies his regrets with groans; Jason seems entirely oblivious to his love Medea's suffering, which she accompanies with groans.

<sup>38</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 430-1).

<sup>39</sup> See below.

<sup>40</sup> Note the brief words on Peuce and the Danube in Butler (1909, 144).

*insula Sarmaticae Peuce stat nomine nymphae,  
toruus ubi et ripa semper metuendus utraque  
in freta per saeuos Hister descendit alumnos.*

(‘There stands an island, Peuce, from the name of the Sarmatian nymph, where there are wild and ever fearful banks, and Hister descends through savage tributaries into the straits’, 8.217-9).<sup>41</sup>

The phrasing in 8.217 is familiar to *Aen.* 3.209-12, where Aeneas and his crew are caught in a storm, and are driven to the Strophades islands. There, the Trojans encounter Celaeno and the other Harpies, who it seems now live here after having been driven from Phineus’ lands by the Apollonian Argonauts (AR 2.178-300). In Virgil, Aeneas and his men have just left Crete, and yet still manage to end up encountering the Harpies in the Strophades.<sup>42</sup> Valerius has already given us the story of Phineus (4.422-529), so it is something of a surprise to find these scenes evoked here. This link to the Harpies may serve to offer an initial subtle link to the monstrous nature of the island,<sup>43</sup> and introduces the idea of a confused timeline into the text. We are immediately thrown as we try to piece together the combination of references at this point, and already the location, but also the timeframe in which the event is taking place, is destabilized. The scene is set for further analysis, and the revelation of Peuce’s story reveals that their location of choice in which to marry is questionable at best.

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<sup>41</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 431-3).

<sup>42</sup> See Nelis (2001, 33-8) for a detailed examination of the links between *Aeneid* 3 and Apollonius’ *Argonautica* 2, links recognised by Servius (on 3.209).

<sup>43</sup> See chapter 3 for a discussion of monsters in the poem.

The introduction to Peuce's location using the present tense verb *stare* is of note. The vividness of a description may be increased when a present tense verb is used in this manner. This technique, known as *repraesentatio* in Latin and *enargeia* in Greek, enhances the verisimilitude and immediacy of this faraway place, arguably making it easier to picture the location in one's mind's eye.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the poet's choice of vocabulary insists that we put Peuce at the forefront of our minds: the island is indeed very present, and that presence is being loud-hailed. In addition, the introduction to this section may be seen as formulaic: the present tense phrase 'there stands' is similar to other introductions to landscapes, and particularly the 'place of beauty', or *locus amoenus*.<sup>45</sup> Such places are often the scene of sinister acts and violence.<sup>46</sup> The subtle phrasing of this introduction therefore gives the audience a hint that this small island is not insignificant, and that something important will occur there.

The brevity of Valerius' introduction to the island which holds the key for so much of Jason and Medea's future means there is a risk that we might view the wedding venue insignificant. However, to do so means missing the transgressive features of the island, and passing over the links which in fact the island has with the Apollonian setting for the wedding, Drepane. In comparing the two islands, the transgressive features of Peuce are laid bare. On a textual level, the present tense verb *stat* (8.217) used to introduce the Valerian Peuce suggests not only the *locus amoenus*; it also activates a link between this island, and the location used in

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<sup>44</sup> See for example Walker (1993), Otto (2009), Webb (2009).

<sup>45</sup> Serv. ad *Aen.* 5.734. On the *locus amoenus* in Imperial literature, see, McIntyre (2008, plus bibliography). Segal (1969, 7) argues that Ovid introduces a new episode in the narrative of his *Metamorphoses* through changes in scenery (though he points out (*ibid.*, 5) that the poem contains very little actual detailed description of nature), and that such introductions usually comprise two words. He lists the following examples from Ovid: *est nemus* (*Met.* 1.568); *fons erat* (*Met.* 3.407); *est sinus* (*Met.* 11.229) and *parius erat gurgis* (*Met.* 14.51). See Hinds (1987, 35) on the *locus amoenus* as a 'place of performance'. See Brown (1994) for more instances of the figure, and below on the importance of the name Peuce itself in this regard.

<sup>46</sup> See below.

Apollonius, Drepane. The Hellenistic poet introduces Drepane using a present tense verb: ἔστι ('there is [...an island, i.e. Drepane]', AR 4.982). Aside from the foreboding connotations of the *locus amoenus* which are evoked by this short, present-tense introduction to Valerius' Peuce, there is also therefore a textual connection to the wedding of Jason and Medea in Apollonius. This link between the two texts is then reinforced by the Roman poet through consideration of the shape of the two island wedding venues. In fact, Drepane and Peuce have further intriguing connections which show that in the Roman epic, Peuce was not chosen by chance to stage this important wedding scene.

Other than a tantalising hint of Peuce's mysterious connection to a nymph of the same name, and a clue to its geographical location, Valerius does not offer his audience much in the way of descriptive information about his chosen venue for his protagonists' wedding. On the other hand, Apollonius' passing mention of Peuce is more descriptive, and it opens up Valerius' own use of the island. To assume that Valerius has simply taken the decision to use a location mentioned by Apollonius in passing to stage the wedding is to miss the nuances of that decision. When reading Valerius' truncated description of Peuce against not only the more detailed inclusion of it in Apollonius, but also against the description of Drepane, we are able to better understand Valerius' subtle approach in staging the wedding there, and thus elucidate the transgressive features of the Roman Peuce. Apollonius gives a brief description of Peuce as the Argonauts sail by and are being chased by the Colchians:

Ἰστρῶ γάρ τις νῆσος ἐέργεται οὐνομα<sup>47</sup> Πεύκη,  
 τριγλώχιν, εὖρος μὲν ἐς αἰγιαλούς ἀνέχουσα,

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<sup>47</sup> This word is also picked up by Valerius in *nomine* (8.217).

στεινὸν δ' αὖτ' ἀγκῶνα ποτὶ ῥόον· ἀμφὶ δὲ δοιαί  
σχίζονται προχοαί. τὴν μὲν καλέουσι Νάρηκος·  
τὴν δ' ὑπὸ τῇ νεάτῃ, Καλὸν στόμα [...]

(‘For a certain three-cornered island named Peuce is enclosed  
by the Hister, with its wide side projecting out to the coast  
and its narrow end toward the river, around which the  
outflow splits in two. They call the one entrance Narex, the  
other, on the southern end, Fair mouth’, AR 4.309-13 (Trans.  
Race))

The river Hister is here described as emptying out into the sea via two mouths as it flows around the triangular-shaped island. This is significant for the Argonauts, since Absyrtus and the Colchians take one route, while the Argonauts take the other in an effort to avoid their enemy (AR 4.304-8). At first sight, this Apollonian reference to Peuce, whilst interesting and obviously worthy of mention, might not seem all that meaningful; the description is seemingly present to aid the reader to imagine the scene as the chase continues. Furthermore, Apollonius makes no direct and obvious link between Drepane and Peuce; and why should he, when we know that the Argonauts will travel across Europe prior to arriving on Drepane, and have a lot of distance to cover before the wedding takes place there. However, when considering each of these descriptions of Peuce together, we are able to construct a mental picture of the island. In doing so, a connection between the Apollonian Peuce (AR 4.309-13) and Drepane (AR 4.982-92) begins to emerge.



A first clue of a link between the two wedding locations comes in the aetiology of Drepane's name:

ἔστι δέ τις πορθμοῖο παροιτέρη Ἰονίοιο  
ἀμφιλαφῆς πείρα Κεραυνίη εἰν ἀλὶ νῆσος,  
ἣ ὕπο δὴ κείσθαι δρέπανον φάτις - ἴλατε Μοῦσαι,  
οὐκ ἐθέλων ἐνέπω προτέρων ἔπος - ᾧ ἀπὸ πατρὸς  
μήδεα νηλειῶς ἔταμεν Κρόνος· οἱ δέ ἐ Διὸς  
κλείουσι χθονίης καλαμητόμον ἔμμεναι ἄρπην.  
Δηὼ γὰρ κείνη ἐνὶ δὴ ποτε νάσσατο γαίῃ,  
Τιτῆνας δ' ἔδαε στάχυν ὄμπνιον ἀμήσασθαι,  
Μάκριδα φιλαμένη. Δρεπάνη τόθεν ἐκλήισται  
οὔνομα, Φαιήκων ἱερὴ τροφός· ὥς δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ  
αἵματος Οὐρανίοιο γένος Φαίηκες ἔασιν.

(‘There is a fertile, expansive island at the entrance of the Ionian strait in the Ceraunian sea, under which is said to lie the sickle – forgive me, Muses, not willingly do I repeat my predecessor’s words – with which Cronus ruthlessly cut off his father’s [i.e. of Uranus] genitals. Others, however, say it is reaping scythe of indigenous Demeter. For Demeter once lived in that land and taught the Titans how to harvest the bountiful grain, out of devotion to Macris. Since then the divine nurse of the Phaeacians has been called by the name

Drepane, and thus the Phaeacians themselves are descended  
from Uranus' blood', AR 4.982-92 (Trans. Race)).<sup>48</sup>

In the two possibilities for its name, it seems that like Peuce (the triangular island), Drepane is also an island of notable shape: Drepane is sickle-shaped, and this is reflected in its name.<sup>49</sup> These two Apollonian island locations are therefore linked in terms of their distinctive shapes. Of interest here is another island of noted shape: Drepanum, the location at which Anchises is lost (*Aen.* 3.706-15).<sup>50</sup> Drepanum, a name with striking similarities to the name Drepane, is actually Sicily, another noted three-cornered isle; a further correspondence is that Sicily also has a sickle place name, Zancle.<sup>51</sup> The shape of all three of these closely-related island locations is therefore of interest in these stories, and both Peuce and Drepane in Apollonius are of note in this regard.

Valerius' description of Peuce omits topographical detail such as this.<sup>52</sup> However perhaps this is because Apollonius has *already* informed us of its three-cornered shape.<sup>53</sup> Those familiar with Apollonius (and indeed Virgil) may have been able to complete the gaps in the Roman description by referring to the earlier poems. What Valerius does *not* say is therefore the key to furthering the information we have about Peuce. No longer are the Argonauts sailing by this triangular island of Peuce

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<sup>48</sup> Hunter (1993, 69) points out a link between the killing of Absyrtus (Medea's brother) in Apollonius (4.477) and the marriage of Jason and Medea. He also discusses Drepane's sickle-shape, the possible link in its name to Demeter and 'the importance of Hecate-Persephone; Medea and her family are Titans, and Medea taught Jason how to 'harvest a crop'.

<sup>49</sup> Dyck (1989, 465).

<sup>50</sup> In a further link between these locations, Anchises' death is pointedly not foretold by Celaeno the Harpie during the Trojans' sojourn in the Strophades.

<sup>51</sup> See Nelis (2001, 58-73) for more on the Drepane-Drepanum link. On Zancle, see for example Wilson (1990) and Smith and Serrati (2000).

<sup>52</sup> Valerius does offer *gemino nam cingitur insula flexu / Danubii* ('for the island is severed by twin bends of the Danube', 8.377-8), but this still does not elucidate the island's shape.

<sup>53</sup> See Zissos (1999b) on 'negative allusion', and Valerius' complex appropriation of elements of his forbears' versions.

without stopping, en route to a *different* but also distinctively-shaped island (Drepane), which will form the destination and ultimate location for the nuptials (an island which itself was ‘passed by’ by the *Argo* in the *Odyssey*). In the Roman poem, the Argonauts *will* stop at Peuce, for it is *here* that the wedding will take place. Therefore, the present tense verbs used to introduce the island wedding locations in the two texts links them together, and Valerius’ negative allusion to the shape of Peuce (that is, the information he chooses *not* to reveal about it rather than what he does), leads us on to recall the important shape of Drepane in Apollonius, and thus the previous wedding venue.

It is of course also worth pausing over the information which *is* given to us by Valerius’ narrator at this point in the text (8.217): that Peuce is named after a Sarmatian nymph. This shows that the island is expressly female, as it once was a nymph. The island’s triangular shape, as extrapolated from Apollonius, may also hint at this, providing an allusion to female genitalia.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Peuce’s classification as Sarmatian in the Roman text might suggest an intriguing and somewhat anachronistic reference to an important frontier people for the Romans, signifying the ends of the Earth and the very periphery of the frontier.<sup>55</sup> At this point, it is important to remember that during the course of their journey the Argonauts have in fact penetrated further than this later Roman outpost: they are, after all, on their way *back* from Colchis. By highlighting Peuce’s origins in this way, Valerius could be injecting a sense of Roman-ness into the text at an important moment; indeed the wedding scene which follows has been described as a ‘Roman-style

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<sup>54</sup> See Callimachus’ *Hymn to Delos* 191-4 for the story of that island as a female swimmer. As Cohen (2007, 326) points out, in the ancient Greek mythological landscape, rivers were typically gendered male, and springs, female: ‘the Greek mythological landscape was fundamentally a bodyscape’ (ibid. 327).

<sup>55</sup> For Peuce itself as a contemporary reference point for the Danube frontier, cf. Mart. 7.7.1, 7.84.3: *i, liber, ad Geticam Peucen Histrumque iacentem*. Syme (1929) has some discussion of references to the Sarmatians as relevant to issues of dating of Valerius’ work, though the work of Stover (2008 and 2012) may now supersede that. On Romans, Dacians, and Sarmatians, see Wilkes (1983).

wedding ritual'.<sup>56</sup> It is clear that when reading Valerius' short, three-line introduction to Peuce it is possible to activate a number of parallels in earlier texts, which hint that here, Peuce is a suitable place for Jason and Medea's wedding. If these three lines were the only reference to Peuce, in terms of space allocated, it would more readily correspond to the short mention given to it by Apollonius. However this is not the end of Peuce's involvement in this version of the myth, and what is soon to be revealed by the narrator underscores the troubling nature of the protagonists' decision to marry on this distinctively-shaped, demonstratively feminine, island.

### 1.3 Jason and Medea's wedding: Valerius' version

Now that the island location has been briefly but evocatively introduced, and the timeline for the wedding itself pointedly destabilized in the language used to introduce it, we now turn to the actual wedding itself, as Valerius describes it. Medea is upset at this point in the Roman *Argonautica* (8.204-6), hesitant and full of trepidation about her pending union; however she is in no doubt about what the future holds for her, despite her isolation and anguish. Indeed, in Valerius it seems that Jason and Medea marry entirely voluntarily, and importantly, the venue is their choice. This is in contrast to their situation as Apollonius tells it. There, the wedding is arranged under duress, a necessary course of action given the situation they faced; they would both rather marry in Iolcus (AR 4.1160-4). On the beach at Peuce, the

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<sup>56</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 213). The passage in question: *inde ubi sacrificas cum coniuge uenit ad aras / Aesonides, unaque adeunt pariterque precari / incipiunt, ignem Pollux undamque iugalem / praetulit, et dextrum pariter uertuntur in orbem*. ('Then, when Jason came with his bride to the sacrificial altars, they approached as one and together began to pray, Pollux carried before him fire and matrimonial water, and together they turn in a circle to the right', 8.243-6). Notice the emphasis on 'togetherness' here, with the use of two words which mean this (*pariter* and *una*).

Valerian Jason announces to the crew his intention to marry Medea, and this comes immediately after the introduction to the island. In contrast to events immediately prior to the wedding in Apollonius, there is no hint of fear that the Colchians might arrive at any moment and no damning indictments of the maiden:<sup>57</sup>

*soluere in hoc tandem resides dux litore curas*  
*ac primum socios ausus sua pacta docere*  
*promissamque fidem thalami foedusque iugale.*  
*ultro omnes laeti instigant meritamque fatentur.*

(‘On that shore, the bold leader resolved any remaining concerns and first explained to his companions the pact, his promised pledge of marriage and matrimonial vows. They all mutually and happily encouraged him, and spoke of her merit’, 8.220-3).

It seems at first glance that Medea’s concerns may be unfounded: the Argonauts are in fact praising her. However all is not quite so simple, as the use of the words *primum* and *ausus* demonstrate. These words reflect the opening lines of the epic, where they are used to create impact and drama, in introducing the *Argo* as the first ship to exist:

*prima deum magnis canimus freta peruia natis*  
*fatidicamque ratem Scythici quae Phasidis oras*

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<sup>57</sup> See Zissos (1999b).

*ausa sequi mediosque inter iuga concita cursus*  
*rumpere flammifero tandem consedit Olympo.*

(‘We sing of the straits first crossed by the great sons of gods,  
and of the prophetic ship which dared to follow the shores of  
Scythian Phasis and which broke through between the middle  
of the clashing rocks by a straight course, and rests on starry  
Olympus’, 1.1-4).

Therefore at the same time as the wedding becomes a reality, we are reminded of the potential transgressive nature of his vessel, and the language of ‘daring’ is here used.<sup>58</sup> That impious ship brought the Argonauts here, and made this marriage possible by allowing the Argonauts to gain access to Scythia and the river Phasis, a river highlighted in Valerius’ opening verses. Now, Jason and Medea’s relationship is about to be ratified, and for Valerius to take this opportunity to remind us of the dubious and less than favourable circumstances which surround the whole story surely indicates that for him, the event is a cause of reflection and concern.<sup>59</sup> In the opening lines, the possibility remained for the whole endeavour to be abandoned, thus diverting the horrors of the future for the pair: however, there is no turning back now, and Valerius brings his text full circle to raise the tension here, and throw the transgressive potentiality of this scene into even higher relief.

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<sup>58</sup> Valerius opens his epic using these words in lines 1 and 3. See chapter 6 for more on the transgressive implications of daring. *ausus* may also signify poetic innovation: see Moles (1993) on Livy’s use of this word in his preface.

<sup>59</sup> Note also here that Virgil (*Aen.* 4.166-9) repeats three times the word *prima* in his narrative, immediately following the ‘wedding’ of Dido and Aeneas. Virgil is keen to show that it was at that moment that the calamity for Dido first began. For Foster (1973-4, 32) at *Aen.* 4.169-72 ‘Virgil speaks like the tragic chorus’.

As he prepares for his wedding on Peuce, Jason's appearance is compared to Mars: *qualis sanguineo uictor Gradivus ab Hebro / Idalium furto subit aut dilecta Cythera* ('just like Gradivus, who as victor comes from bloody Hebrus furtively to Idalium or beloved Cythera', 8.228-9), before being compared to Hercules, the hero now long absent from proceedings.<sup>60</sup> Then Venus grants her approval of the match (8.232): *adnuat unanimes Venus*, and her presence might remind the audience that earlier in their story, the goddess played a significant role in drawing Medea to Jason.<sup>61</sup> This comparison surely also evokes Aeneas, another character to 'marry' an exotic and powerful woman, Dido, in a cave; Aeneas was of course the son of Venus, and she had played an important role in *their* union.<sup>62</sup> This again destabilizes the timeframe of what is occurring at this point, and begins contributes further to the reader's sense of unease at what is happening on Peuce.

There are further unsettling precursors to consider when comparing the mortal protagonists to gods in this way, for which we must also look to the *Aeneid*. Firstly, at the occasion of Aeneas' first sight of her, Dido is compared to Diana, the huntress (*Aen.* 1.496-56). Later, as Aeneas and Dido prepare for the hunt on the day of their union, Aeneas is compared to Apollo, twin sibling of Diana (*Aen.* 4.143-50). The implication of comparing Aeneas and Dido to twin siblings reveals their relationship to have elements of the incestuous, and as such it is inappropriate, taboo, and doomed. In Valerius, Medea is herself compared to Diana at the scene of the Jason and Medea's first meeting (5.378-84)<sup>63</sup>. This activates links not only to Dido

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<sup>60</sup> On Hercules' role in the poem, see Adamietz (1970), Stadler (1991), Edwards (1999).

<sup>61</sup> See chapter 5.5 on Venus' intervention.

<sup>62</sup> Venus' response to Juno on giving her the girdle is: '*omne' ait 'imperium natorumque arma meorum / cuncta dedi. quascumque libet nunc concute mentes.*' ('I have given you all power and the weaponry of my sons at once; now terrorise whichever minds you will.' 6.475-6). That she has offered *all* her sons' weaponry may be metapoetically signposting the Valerian reader to keep the *Aeneid* in mind when considering Jason and Medea's relationship.

<sup>63</sup> See below for more on this.

but also to Nausicaa in book 6 of the *Odyssey*.<sup>64</sup> By comparing Medea to Diana and Jason to Mars, Valerius perhaps wishes to vaunt a similarly dubious, transgressive and perhaps even potentially sibling-like relationship between Jason and Medea. Their future battles will certainly be warlike.<sup>65</sup> However Medea does not remain in her likeness to Diana. She soon begins to resemble Venus, when just before the wedding, the goddess dresses Medea in her own clothing and coronal for the ritual itself:<sup>66</sup>

*ipsa suas illi croceo subtegmine uestes*  
*induit, ipsa suam duplicem Cytherea coronam*  
*donat et arsuras alia cum uirgine gemmas.*

(‘Venus dresses her, giving [Medea] her own two-fold  
 headdress and the jewels which will burn along with another  
 bride’, 8.234-6).<sup>67</sup>

Therefore in some ways Medea, at her wedding to Jason, the man just compared to Mars, now resembles the goddess of love. This subtle comparison may hint at the

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<sup>64</sup> See Karakantza (2003, 12), who examines rape imagery in the Odysseus/Nausicaa episode in *Odyssey* 6. She looks at the implications of the comparison Odysseus makes between Nausicaa and Artemis, Diana’s Greek equivalent, at Odysseus’ first meeting with her: more on this below. See also Sourvinou-Inwood (1985), Hunter (1993, index s.v. Nausicaa) and Foley (1984) on the *Odyssey* itself.

<sup>65</sup> Note that Arete and Alcinous are brother and sister as well as husband and wife. By changing the wedding location, this association is removed. See Ojennus 2006, 268) for more on this.

<sup>66</sup> See chapter 3.2 for more analysis of Venus’ involvement this scene.

<sup>67</sup> Here, the hint of the plot from Euripides’ *Medea* invokes the knowing audience to activate their knowledge of Medea’s ‘future’, and enhances the difficulty in their union. While Dido’s outfit is purple rather than the saffron of a bridal gown, nevertheless the extravagant outfit she wears to go hunting is worthy of note: *Cui pharetra ex auro, crines nodantur in aurum,| aurea purpuream subnectit fibula uestem* (*Aen.* 4.138-9). Cf. Lucan’s description of Cato and Marcia’s wedding (*BC* 2.350-91). They marry even though the time for a wedding is inappropriate (*aliena tempora*) and Lucan gives us a negative narration, that is, concentrating on what the characters *do not* do and the elements which are *missing* from the ceremony. Marcia does not wear the usual saffron-coloured gown (*BC* 2.360-1) and hides the purple sash under funerary wool *obsita funerea celatur purpura lana* (*BC* 2.367-8).



story of the clandestine love affair between these divinities, who were caught *in flagrante* by Venus' husband Vulcan and thereafter mocked by a panoply of gods.<sup>68</sup> This illicit coupling, though very famous and perhaps the beginnings of Cupid's existence, can hardly be said to be linked with a happy ending, instead leading to exposure and ridicule.<sup>69</sup> Later in their lives this is precisely what both Jason and Medea fear: Jason wishes to be seen as legitimate and seeks to marry a 'true' Greek woman to achieve this; Medea wants Jason to recognise their vows and does not want to appear weak to her enemies.<sup>70</sup> Valerius carefully layers intertextual links here to characters both mortal and divine, exposing their deep-rooted fears, the inappropriate nature of the match, and the inevitability (albeit unknown to the main characters) of the failure of this marriage. Medea and Jason appear godlike at their wedding, but this is in no way a positive thing. The comparison is an uneasy one, and their actions unwise – and transgressive.

As Medea is finally dressed in her saffron gown (a Roman convention),<sup>71</sup> only now is she at ease: *tum nouus impleuit uultus honor ac sua flauis / reddita cura comis graditurque*<sup>72</sup> *oblita malorum* ('then a new dignity adorned her features, and having rearranged her own blonde hair, she strode on forgetful of maladies', 8.237-8). Valerius then evokes more Roman image in relation to the wedding, a confusing anachronism. He compares Medea's now settled state of mind to those who follow Cybele's celebrations:

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<sup>68</sup> See *Od.* 8.267-8. Ovid argues (*Trist.* 2.371-80) that this story was inspiration for his retelling the story (*Ars.* 2.561-94); on this see P. Davis (2006).

<sup>69</sup> On this story in *Ars.* 2.535-42, see Sharrock (2006). This episode is also a driver for Venus' monstrous behaviour at Lemnos in book 2; see chapter 4.1.

<sup>70</sup> See for example Eur. *Med.* 382: θανούσα θήσω τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἐχθροῖς γέλων.

<sup>71</sup> See for example Catullus 61 for a description of wedding ritual.

<sup>72</sup> Notice that cognates of this word are used in the comparisons of both Aeneas to Apollo (*Aen.* 4.147) and Dido to Diana (*Aen.* 1.453); intriguingly Jason is compared to Apollo leaving one of his temples at AR 1.307-9.

*sic, ubi Mygdonios planctus sacer abluit Almo  
laetaque iam Cybele festaeque per oppida taedae,  
quis modo tam saeuos adytis fluxisse cruores  
cogitet? haut ipsi quin iam meminere ministri.*

(‘Just as when sacred Almo washes away Mygdonian lamentations, and Cybele now is happy and the festive torches are throughout the city. Who would think that just now savage wounds had poured forth in the holy sanctuaries? By no means have the priests themselves remembered’, 8.239-42)<sup>73</sup>

Following this simile, the ceremony-proper begins, with the ‘Roman-style wedding ritual’ taking place,<sup>74</sup> complete with celebratory feast. Again, the scene moves apace, with scant details but lots of intrigue, as Mopsus completes his duties as priest, presumably overseeing the event. His skills of foresight are tested, and, just as the narrator makes reference to Medea’s wedding finery being destined for serious misfortune, Mopsus also fails to see positive things in the couple’s future (8.247-51). This link of common future knowledge between the poet and Mopsus is complete when the narrator addresses Medea directly, in a striking moment of apostrophe:

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Ov. *Fast.* 4.337-8, where the Almo is described as a significant site for worship of Cybele. The goddess plays a significant role in Valerius, where Cyzicus suffers her wrath after killing her sacred lion (3.20-31, see chapter 4.3). See Gibson (2006, 159-60) on Statius’ description of Cybele’s worship at the Almo (*Silv.* 5.2). Note that in both *Fast.* 4.377-8 and *Silv.* 5.1.222, the river is introduced using the *est locus* formula (see Gibson 2006, 159).

<sup>74</sup> See note 55 above.

*inde ubi sacrificas cum coniuge uenit ad aras  
Aesonides unaque adeunt pariterque precari  
incipiunt, ignem Pollux undamque iugalem  
praetulit et dextrum pariter uertuntur in orbem.  
sed neque se pingues tum candida flamma per auras  
explicuit nec tura uidet concordia Mopsus  
promissam nec stare fidem, breue tempus amorum.  
odit utrumque simul, simul et miseratur utrumque  
et tibi tum nullos optauit, barbaras, natos.*

(‘Then, when Jason came with his bride to the sacrificial altars, they approached as one and together began to pray, Pollux carried before him fire and matrimonial water, and together they turn in a circle to the right. But then the bright flame did not flare up through the pungent air, and Mopsus does not see concord in the incense, nor the promise of trust immovable, a short spell of love. He hates them both, and pities them both at the same time, and wishes then for you no children, barbarian maiden’, 8.243-51)

The apostrophe here is a powerful interjection by the narrator. It aligns his fictional character’s powers to his own and to those of the audience (since all three have the unique ability to look back to a text, Euripides’ and Seneca’s *Medea*, which themselves look ‘forward’ to aspects of Medea’s later life). This constitutes a further troubling element of the wedding scene, which complements the complex and

layered picture constructed by Valerius so far. In the build-up to the wedding, we learn that Jason and Medea are marrying on an island with an evocative shape, reminiscent of other prominently-shaped islands which have links to weddings, and in the case of Drepanum (i.e. Sicily), links to sexual violation (particularly in relation to the rape of Proserpina).<sup>75</sup> They are in turn compared to Mars and Venus, who in their mythical past indulged in an extra-marital affair which resulted in mockery by a large audience – the very thing which both Jason and Medea will fear in later life. Furthermore, by bringing in complex references to other stories in his use of vocabulary, such as in the present tense of the verb *stare*, and in the introduction of the theme of daring, Valerius demands that we look at this scene further. He continues to do this by evoking features of a Roman wedding ritual, features which would not have existed at the time of Jason's wedding to Medea. In imposing anachronistic features like this, a complex and confusing timeline is brought to bear on this scene of intended celebration. We struggle to deal with the various layers of intertextuality brought together as the pair marry, and are made to feel distinctly uneasy at the ratification of this transgressive union, since it is underscored by all of this intertextual word play and multiple suggestions that this is an unwise decision.

It is at this very moment, as we tackle the density of references which abound as Jason and Medea take their vows, that the island's back-story is brought surprisingly back into the text. However, Peuce is no longer referred to as an island; instead, the narrator expands upon the experience of the nymph herself, which goes yet further to destabilise and undermine this happy occasion, and to firmly bring to the foreground the truly transgressive nature of their pairing.

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<sup>75</sup> See below for more on this character.

## **1.4 The rape of Peuce**

As we have seen above, the island of Peuce is introduced to the reader with seemingly scant details (8.217-9). However, as discussed, there is intriguing information to be unpicked in this brief, three-line description. In its present tense verb description and intriguing shape, comparisons can be made with the Apollonian wedding venue, Drepane. It is on the beach on Peuce that Jason addresses his crew and informs them of his intention to marry Medea there (8.220-3): we are therefore left in no doubt of the significance of the island itself. Valerius is not prepared to leave the description of the island at that, however, and we in fact learn a great deal more about the island, though once again in a brief but impactful two-line description.

We expect that a wedding should be a happy event, but Valerius has employed a number of tactics at the outset to undermine the celebratory tone of this match. We are given a moment of respite from the tension that has been built in the lead-up to the wedding itself, where with a little prompting from Cupid (8.232-3), Medea is able to shake off her negative feelings. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the circumstances in the Valerian wedding contrast with the subterfuge and rapidity of Apollonius' account of the wedding, not least since here the protagonists appear to be marrying voluntarily. These factors help to momentarily reassure us that the ceremony and accompanying festivities will perhaps be joyous after all. However just as Jason and Medea marry and begin their wedding feast, Valerius' narrator unexpectedly and somewhat jarringly, reintroduces Peuce:

*gramineis ast inde toris discumbitur, olim*

*Hister anhelantem Peucen quo presserat antro*

(‘but then they recline to dine upon grassy mounds, in the cave in which once Hister had attacked the panting Peuce’, 8.255-6).<sup>76</sup>

Suddenly, rather than simply being an island named after a nymph, Peuce is now personified, and here we learn that she was attacked by the river Hister, in this very cave. Immediately any feelings of unease which have been building are transformed into something more sinister. We might have expected that a nymph would be present at this wedding, given that it takes place in a cave, and nymphs took part in the wedding rituals of both the Apollonian Jason and Medea,<sup>77</sup> and Dido and Aeneas.<sup>78</sup> However at this wedding, the nymph is not physically present. Instead, in a short description of the vestige of her presence in the cave, we learn that Peuce was once here, and it is here that she was physically and sexually attacked. This account of Peuce’s (albeit indirect) involvement with Jason and Medea’s wedding is something more than the mere ‘mention of a mythological union which took place in a cave’;<sup>79</sup> in fact, we shall see that Peuce’s story is certainly not the happy tale which

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<sup>76</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 441-2).

<sup>77</sup> Apollonius’ text mentions nymphs as he hints at the physical consummation of the newlyweds’ marriage after their wedding at Drepane: κείνο καὶ εἰσέτι νῦν ἱερὸν κληίζεται ἄντρον | Μηδείης, ὅθι τοὺς γε σὺν ἀλλήλοισιν ἔμειξαν | τεινόμεναι ἑανοὺς εὐώδεας (‘To this day that holy cave is called Medea’s cave, where the nymphs spread fragrant linen and joined the couple together,’ AR 4.1153-4).

<sup>78</sup> Aeneas and Dido shelter in the same cave during a storm contrived by Juno and Venus (*Aen.* 4.165-8). Note that as she confronts Aeneas, she asks to swear by his ‘right hand’ *per ego has lacrimas dextramque tuam te* (*Aen.* 4.314), but there is no such gesture at the ‘wedding’ itself (see Kaimio (1988) on missing gestures in recognizable scenarios). This echoes Apollonius, where this gesture is omitted in the wedding of Jason and Medea. On this, see Ojennus (2006, 266) who argues that Apollonius’ wedding scene is reminiscent of the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope, with the ‘marriage gesture’ to be found at *Od.* 18.258.

<sup>79</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 213).

one would perhaps desire to link to any wedding. Valerius' narrator here punctuates the wedding scene with a short, jarring one-line window onto a mythological scene of terrifying violence, unwelcome at any time never mind in relation to such a celebration.<sup>80</sup> This violation occurred sometime in the past, before Jason and Medea's wedding, and may have resulted in the metamorphosis of Peuce into the island upon which Jason and Medea choose to marry.<sup>81</sup> Analysis of the text reveals that at some point, the personified Hister chose the nymph Peuce as his quarry, a target for his sexual advances, and she tried to escape him – and this is the location in which our protagonists have chosen to marry.

At first glance, the full horror of what is being implied is not obvious. At first sight, there does not seem to be much in the way of explanation, or character development, of either Hister or Peuce.<sup>82</sup> That said, we might now look back at 8.219, where Peuce is first introduced. There, Hister is characterised as *saevos*, savage: in the light of this new information, this is perhaps something more than a ethnographical hint at the nature of the people who populate the river's banks. The attack is not described in detail, though this should not surprise us, as none of Ovid's rapes (for example) are explicitly described.<sup>83</sup> However this factor alone should not convince us that this short scene is benign.<sup>84</sup> This new mention of Peuce is powerful in its brevity, and the timing of this intervention could not be more crucial. We can be sure that some sort of sexual attack has occurred, and this is evident from the use of the verb *presserat*. An analysis of this verb is necessary to ensure that we fully

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Cat. 64, where the story of the hardly auspicious encounter between Theseus and Ariadne is an unwelcome intrusion into the story of Peleus and Thetis; amongst these stories is interwoven a hint of the Argonautic myth.

<sup>81</sup> See below.

<sup>82</sup> See Murgatroyd (2005, 65) on the lack of development of rapists or victims in the *Fasti*.

<sup>83</sup> Richlin (1992, 165) also notes however that 'whereas a rape is not normally explicitly described, the text makes up for this in the metamorphosis'.

<sup>84</sup> A Cohen (1996, 119) points out that the 'absence of a word, in and of itself, does not prove the absence of a concept'. Here, the word is not absent.

understand the significance of this scene. The verb of note here is the third-person pluperfect tense verb *presserat*, from *premo*, *premere*. Interestingly, at this point in their translations, Hershkowitz, Slavitt and Mozley all render *presserat* as ‘had caught’ – this is the location in which Hister ‘had caught’ Peuce ‘to his breast’.<sup>85</sup> These translations differ quite significantly from that presented above. The problem is that at first glance, a translation of ‘had caught’ does not signify menace. While the pluperfect tense is successfully conveyed, indicating that a considerable length of time (albeit an unknown period) has passed between this event and the wedding, the word ‘caught’ is less than satisfactory. Translating *premo* in such a way fails to adequately represent the horror of what happened to Peuce in this location,<sup>86</sup> and thus the juxtaposition of this scene with the wedding is not fully brought to bear.

As there is no preposition *ad* or noun such as *pectus* in these lines, we might assume that these translations include the words meaning ‘to his breast’ in an attempt to convey euphemistically the idea of sexual assault or rape, therefore this sense of ‘catching’ in these translations must be closer to the idea of ‘seizing’ and ‘grabbing’, rather than the idea of simply ‘reaching’. If this is true, then we might immediately be put in the mind of verbs such as *cipio* and *rapio*, from which our own word ‘rape’ derives. In antiquity ‘linguistic pointers to rape are very few’,<sup>87</sup> and as such it is clear that at this point we must examine *premo* further, both in this text and elsewhere, to shed light on its true meaning and to fully explore and understand Peuce’s experience.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Liberman goes for ‘étréint’, which loosely translates as ‘hugged’ or ‘embraced’.

<sup>86</sup> Scafuro (1990, 126) comments that of the fourth and fifth century authors she considers, ‘very few of them specify the nature of the sexual union, i.e. their language is most often neutral as regards whether the unmarried girl was an acquiescing or forced participant’.

<sup>87</sup> Scafuro (1990, 132).

<sup>88</sup> See Scafuro (1990, 149) on the significance of shame in the discourse of rape: ‘Euripides is unique in crossing the boundaries of shame and creating a ‘female’ discourse about rape’ (ibid., 127). Here, Peuce is not afforded the privilege of a voice in the text, however as we shall see, Medea’s plight can



A glance at the definitions of the word *premo* in the *OLD* (there are over twenty) reveals that the majority of them are more closely linked to actions of pursuit, applying pressure or exerting force than the idea of ‘catching’, and thus are in fact rather sinister in nature. Indeed, the word *premo* (or cognates thereof) is used 39 times in our text, and more often than not it denotes an action of pursuit, violence or very heavy weight, or is linked to actions such as these.<sup>89</sup> The *OLD* links the line in question in Valerius with the definition ‘to copulate, to have intercourse with’, specifying within this ‘of men, male animals’.<sup>90</sup> The verb is of course etymologically linked to the English word ‘press’, which again might hold negative connotations such as of restriction, oppression and suppression, or of insistence, when interpreting as a chase (e.g. to ‘press on’).

The verb *premo* (or cognates thereof) is used in the *Argonautica* in a variety of contexts, but in the vast number of instances in circumstances linked in some way to unpleasantness and force. There are nine instances of attack: it is used when Hercules plies his bow with many arrows (2.522); as Neptune begs Amycus to attack lesser kings than the Argonauts (4.130); when Pollux presses Amycus hard with a rain of blows (4.305); during Phineus’ predictions about the death of Pollux and Castor (4.524); to show how Argonauts and Cytaei attack the Scythians on the plains (6.428); as Absyrtus fights and ‘tramples the groans of the living mass’ (6.523);

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be closely related to that of the nymph. Medea’s stance and the narrator’s description of her (8.204-6) quite clearly indicate that Medea feels great shame for what she has done.

<sup>89</sup> Scafuro (1990, 128) sees *comprimere* as a ‘neutral’ word: ‘insofar as [it] connote[s] neither the acquiescence in nor compulsion of the union’.

<sup>90</sup> *OLD* 2. a and b; parallel citations offered are Stat. *Theb.* 1.122 and 7.462; Prop. 1.13.22; Suet. *Cal.* 25.1; Mart. 3.58.17. The story of Tyro is connected to the Argonautic myth, in that Neptune rapes Tyro whilst he is disguised as the river Enipeus (see also *Od.* 11.236-54, Apollodorus 1.9.8; Sophocles’ *Tyro* plays). In Apollodorus (1.9.8), Tyro seems to desire sexual relations with a god, and the encounter ends up being not with the god she intended. It is not certain that the river Hister is a god, however. *TLL* lists two categories: x/2.1170.26ff (*de amplexantibus, osculantibus, palpatibus sim*) and 1173.8ff (*respicitur stuprum, coitus*) Where one definition might imply a more violent action than the other, both are connected with sexual congress. Scafuro (1990, 136) argues that ‘the non-differentiated language of sexual union that we have seen in our myths is a reflection of the cultural ambivalence that is inherent in the laws’.

describing the way the warriors beset Jason (6.684); when Jason presses his knee into the bull to overcome it (7.594); and as Jason kills the earth-born men (7.621). We also find it used on five occasions to describe darkness/sleep covering an area/person: for example, of night ‘burying’ everything with the dark sky (1.617); of a heavy shade lying on a region (3.215), sleep lying on the earth (3.417); the Cyaneans’ shadow looming over the ship (4.681); quiet holding Medea’s limbs in her sleep (5.334).<sup>91</sup> The verb is used four times to describe crushing: for example, where Typhoeus lies crushed beneath Sicilian soil (2.24); Neptune pressed Etna on Typhoeus’ head (2.30); the Cyanean rocks crush their own cliffs (4.564); and Medea has long desired to be buried and crushed to hide the shame of her actions (7.298). Four times the verb is used denoting pressure, e.g. the simile describing Aeson as a ‘hemmed-in lion’, who ‘wrinkles his cheeks and eyes wondering what to do next (1.758); the *Argo* passing Acherusian shores under the pressure of the wind (5.73); Aeetes is ‘under pressure of adverse war’ (5.554), the bulls are pressed by the ploughshare (7.63). We find *premo* used in the context of oppression: the cold upon Scythian lands (1.513) and Jove’s oppression of Phineus (4.474).<sup>92</sup> There are no instances where the verb can be interpreted as ‘to catch’ in any of these examples.

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<sup>91</sup> See chapter 5.3 on the prescience of Medea’s dream.

<sup>92</sup> There are also three examples of *premo* denoting closing eyes/kissing (but not a passionate, loving kiss): Pelias pressing his lips into Acastus’ footprints when he leaves with the *Argo* (1.711); Alcimede begging Aeson to close her eyes with his hands (1.334); the men of Lesbos cover their eyes as their wives attack (2.227). We find two uses in connection with burden or weight: the freight of the *Argo* (1.203) and the men ‘burden the green banks’ with wine and grain for the journey (5.216); two of pursuit: for example, Hercules and Telamon press on at the sound of the captured maiden’s voice (2.454); Europe breaks away from pursuing Asia (2.614); two of repression of emotion: Aeson usually conceals his concerns about his son (1.733); and Jason must repress the extremity of his sorrow (3.370) two of persuasion: Jason urges on his men at the Cyanean rocks (4.649); the stern counsel of Jason’s men persuade him (8.465); one of the depictions of images in embroidery: Hypsipyle depicts with her needle the story of her father’s rescue upon the cloak she will give to Jason (2.411); and finally one of the urgent onset of daylight (2.214).

Lewis and Short suggest that the meaning of *presserat* at 8.256 should be rendered as ‘had forced’, which could be euphemistic for a sexual meaning.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, we find the word used in other texts, during infamous episodes of rape. For example, Livy uses cognates of the word *premo* to describe the sexual attacks inflicted on the vestal virgin Rhea Silvia:<sup>94</sup> *ui compressa Vestalis*, Livy 1.1.18); and Lucretia: *sinistraque manu mulieris pectore oppresso* (‘and as he pressed down on the maiden’s chest with his hand,’ Livy 1.58.2).<sup>95</sup> We should also note that the verb is once again used in association with the rape of Lucretia in Ovid’s account in the *Fasti*: *utque torum pressit, ‘ferrum, Lucretia, mecum est’ | ‘natus’ ait ‘regis’ Tarquiniusque loquor*’ (‘And when he pressed the bed, he said “Lucretia, the sword is in my hand and I speak as Tarquin, son of the king”’, *Fast.* 2.794-6).<sup>96</sup>

When we look at the uses of the word in these other works, it does not seem appropriate to render *presserat* as ‘had caught’. There is nothing in this word alone to suggest that something untoward has occurred.<sup>97</sup> However, when we look at the use of *presserat*<sup>98</sup> and link it with Peuce’s status at the time, *anhelantem*, it becomes clear that something more unpleasant has occurred. Panting is not something which one does during a period of exertion; it normally occurs once that activity has ceased.

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<sup>93</sup> Lewis & Short is a nineteenth-century dictionary, and so is likely to only ever deal in euphemisms in reference to such sensitive material. Adams (1982, 182) points out that ‘*comprimere* was probably a native Latin euphemism of the educated language’.

<sup>94</sup> See also *Ov. Am.* 3.6 for the story of the rape victim Rhea Silvia (given her other name of Ilia), who throws herself in the river Tiber, becoming one with it. Beard (1999, 1-2) points out that this was the ‘original model for the whole set of institutions that we call ‘Roman marriage’’. On this, see Miles (1995, 179-219). See below for further discussion of rivers and rape and for *Amores* 3.6 in particular.

<sup>95</sup> See Moses (1993), Arieti (1997), Beard (1999), and Dixon (2001) for discussion of Livy’s rape narratives; see Mustakallio (1999) and Stevenson (2011) on the role of women in Livy 1.

<sup>96</sup> See Richlin (1992, 62) on Ovid indicating that the woman’s appearance of panic in flight makes her more attractive.

<sup>97</sup> Scafuro (1990, 128) argues that some words are ‘neutral’ until they are augmented by ‘qualifying’ words, and they then become signifiers of violence. She lists as examples of such words/phrases the following, in Latin: ‘*rem habere* (‘to have sex with’), *stuprum* (‘illicit sexual relations’), *comcumbo* (‘lie together with’), *comprimere* and cognates (‘embrace’, or as a euphemism, ‘have sex with’), and *gravidam facere* (‘to make pregnant’)

<sup>98</sup> ‘When *comprimere* is used to specify rape, qualifying words such as *ui* (‘by force’) or circumstantial adjectives describing the condition of the young man such as *uinolentus* (‘drunk’) secure the context of rape’ Scafuro (1990, 152 n. 6).

Indeed, Peuce's capture may have been *accompanied* by resultant panting (with the panic rendered from the chase making her all the more attractive and thus a candidate for sexual attack).<sup>99</sup> The very fact that Peuce is exhausted indicates that she has been involved in intense activity, most probably trying to escape her predator. The participle *anhelantem* is therefore the 'qualifying word' we need to fully reveal this as a sexual attack.

If further indication were needed that the poet is not interested in showing us that Hister had benignly 'caught' Peuce in her cave, we should turn to the use of the verb once again almost immediately after the scene in which Peuce's experience is briefly, and tellingly, described. The poet highlights the intensity of the pursuit to which the nymph Peuce was subjected just seven lines later, where *premo* is used once again. This time, we have the present participle *premens*, used to qualify Absyrtus' actions as he strives to reach the Argonauts:

*quis nouus inceptos timor impediit hymenaeos*  
*turbauitque toros et sacra calentia rupit?*  
*Absyrtus subita praeceps cum classe parentis*  
*aduehitur profugis infestam lampada Grais*  
*concutiens diroque premens clamore sororem*

(‘Which new alarm has hampered the nuptials just begun, has thrown the couches into disorder, and has interrupted the still-warm sacrifices? Absyrtus, having approached headlong with his father's fleet, is conveyed violently shaking a hostile

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<sup>99</sup> Richlin (1992, 62).

torch at the fleeing Greeks, and with a foreboding call he  
follows hard on the heels of his sister', 8.263-6).<sup>100</sup>

Absyrtus is in hot pursuit of the Argonauts and of his sister Medea, with the *OLD* citing this very passage as an example of a 'chase': 'to press hard in pursuit, follow hard on the heels of'.<sup>101</sup> Words in the perfect tense such as *impediit*, *turbauit* and *rupit* (8.263-4) might initially lead us to believe that Absyrtus has actually already arrived on Peuce. However as we read on, it becomes clear that this is not the case:

*sequiturque uolantem*  
*barbara Palladium puppem ratis, ostia donec*  
*Danubii uiridemque uident ante ostia Peucen*  
*ultimaque adgnoscent Argoi cornua mali*

(‘and the barbarian vessel chases the flying ship of Pallas,  
until they see the mouths of the Danube and green Peuce  
lying before the mouth, and recognise the yard-tips of *Argo*’s  
mast,’ 8.291-4).<sup>102</sup>

Therefore the participle *premens*, attributed in this instance to Medea’s brother, shows that a *pursuit* is in fact in progress, and the translation ‘had caught’ could not be used here either, because he has not quite managed to do so as yet. In the translation above, the phrase ‘follows hard on the heels of’ (underlined above) could just as easily be replaced with ‘attacks’, as Absyrtus goes on to verbally challenge his

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<sup>100</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 443-4).

<sup>101</sup> *OLD premo*, 6.

<sup>102</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 448-9).

sister, Jason and the Greeks (8.264-84). In his rage, Absyrtus himself makes it clear that he has not yet reached his quarry: *hanc, o siquis uobis dolor iraque, Colchi, adcelerate uiam* ('Hurry on your way, Colchians, if you have any grief or anger!' 8.264-5).<sup>103</sup>

From this examination, it is easy to see that there is no sense of love or romance in what occurred between Peuce and Hister, only a sense of sinister urgency and predatory action, instigated by a male, typically the dominant sex. It seems that the sense of urgency is better conveyed in the translation 'attacked' than in 'caught', a word which might not adequately express that there had been a pursuit, and that with this now over, the nymph had succumbed. In the revealing lines about the personified Peuce's plight, is it not enough to understand that she was simply 'caught', even with the added notion of being pressed to Hister's breast, but rather was seized or raped following a pursuit which caused her exhaustion and subsequent concession. A euphemistic translation here does not do justice to what has happened to the nymph, given that, as we shall see, Valerius hints at this scene repeatedly throughout the text which precedes the wedding. Such a translation also fails since it does not allow the reader to access the added meaning here: they are marrying in the very place in which Peuce was attacked. It is important to consider the implications of this event, since 'a text about rape may be something else, but it is still a text about rape'.<sup>104</sup> When we interpret the verb *premo* in terms of violence (or, at best, unpleasantness), we can see that the scene might easily leave the audience feeling uneasy.

Now that we have established the shocking nature of the history of the mysterious island of Peuce, Jason and Medea's decision to marry there can be seen to

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<sup>103</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 443-4).

<sup>104</sup> Richlin (1992, 159).

be questionable at best, though it speaks to Jason and Medea's already transgressive nature, both as characters themselves and when considering the actions they carry out. They marry in a leisurely manner and free from cares, and are not forced to stop at Peuce. In contrast to Apollonius, there is no mention of Jason wishing that he could have married Medea in his own country. Furthermore, although the Colchians are not as close in their pursuit as they are depicted as being in Apollonius just before the wedding in that work, the Argonauts are still being followed at this point in the Roman text, so the break in the journey alone might be seen as ill-advised, not to mention how odd it surely is to depict them as marrying in the location of such an abhorrent act. The Colchians' pursuit in Apollonius brings with it the very real threat of Medea being snatched once again, though this time legally, as her father would have every right to remove her from Jason's care. Alcinous recognises the importance of Medea's virginity in this tricky situation, and Arete prevents Medea's abduction by the Colchians by hastily arranging her secret marriage to Jason. In this way the tension of the situation is alleviated: Medea cannot now be taken back to Colchis by her father as a *parthenos* when she is married.<sup>105</sup> In the Roman epic, this sense of urgency and anxiety over the potential *second* (but *legal*) abduction of Medea cannot be resolved in the same way, as the Argonauts will not reach Drepane before they wed, thus Arete (or another similar character) cannot intervene and save the day. Instead, the insistence of the Colchians is played down to allow Jason and Medea to take their vows in a leisurely manner in a venue of their choice, and the threat of Medea's second 'abduction', a term often conflated with 'rape',<sup>106</sup> is instead replaced by another, but this time mythical, story of rape. Given the literary

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<sup>105</sup> See Beard (1999) on rape as a 'crime of desire', but the uncertainty over the nature of that desire; in Livy's depictions of rape, she sees 'the constant implication of the sexual in the political (and vice versa)'.  
<sup>106</sup> Note Medea is not 'raped' (as in sexually violated without her consent), though she is married without her father's blessing. Peuce, however, *was* raped.

precedents, we might expect nymphs to be present at weddings, present for example to celebrate the occasion (as in Apollonius) or as part of the ritual of marriage (as in Virgil). Here, the nymphs do not fulfil their usual role, since we are presented instead with an attack on a single nymph at the very location of the formalisation of Jason and Medea's union and accompanying feast. The brief interjection which explains her ordeal casts a dark shadow over the nuptials, and serves to chillingly underline this pairing as questionable, and overtly transgressive.

### 1.5 Initial thoughts on interpretation

Peuce's role in the text is therefore certainly not unimportant. We must evaluate the significance of Peuce's story, and one of the issues it presents involves attempting to separate the terms 'rape' and 'abduction'<sup>107</sup> in ancient texts. This is important because in one sense, Medea herself has been abducted by Jason: she is a virgin and her father has not given permission for her to be taken in marriage. He has therefore lost something of a 'bargaining chip'; that is, she can no longer be given in marriage for the purposes of allegiance, political or otherwise.<sup>108</sup> Therefore in the Valerian text the 'real life' *raptor*<sup>109</sup> is of course Jason, even when taking into consideration that Venus and Juno orchestrated bringing the couple together. The word *raptor* it is not an easy word to translate. Lewis and Short suggest the following: 'one who seizes by force, a robber, plunderer, abductor, ravisher'. The *OLD* offers two definitions: 'one who snatches away/runs off with anything' and 'one who carries off (in order to

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<sup>107</sup> On the political implications of rape at Athens, see Harris (1990), McC. Brown (1991), and Omitowoju (2002).

<sup>108</sup> See Beard (1999) on the issue of rape and politics at Rome.

<sup>109</sup> Richlin (1992, 163) points out that Tereus is categorised as a *raptor* at *Met.* 6.518.



violate), a ravisher, abductor'. Perhaps we could also add 'libertine', 'debaucher', 'violator' and 'rapist' to these definitions. There is no doubt that it is a difficult word to interpret, conjuring as it does multiple objectionable ideas: the precise meaning is difficult to pin down, though we know it is unpleasant.

Absyrtus, Medea's brother, reminds us of Jason's status as *raptor* in the lines following Peuce's reintroduction:

*neque enim fugit aequore raptor*

*Iuppiter aut falsi sequimur uestigia tauri.*

(‘nor is this Jupiter, this ravisher who flees across the sea, nor do we chase the footsteps of a false bull’, 8.265-6).

Absyrtus' words are significant on a number of levels. He makes a mythological reference to Europa, another victim of abduction.<sup>110</sup> It seems that in referencing this myth, Absyrtus means to highlight the fact that Jason is certainly not a god, despite the fact that he is a *raptor*, just as Jupiter was. Perhaps he is using the comparison to continue to goad his own ire as well as that of his men, or to prove that they should not be frightened to pursue him. Nonetheless, it is fascinating that Absyrtus reminds us of Jason's status as *raptor* here, particularly in the light of Peuce's plight. Categorising Jason in this way once again throws the spotlight onto the location of their wedding and its troubling past. Indeed the fact that the word throws up so many connotations actually helps to convey what is to some extent Jason's own confused status here, confused because Medea *wants* to leave her homeland: indeed she must,

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<sup>110</sup> See Spaltenstein (2005, 443-4), who notes this association and cites Ov. *Met.* 3.3f). Note that Zeus gives Europa Talos, the bronze/human hybrid (AR 4. 1643). Though Valerius' poem breaks off before we see the monster, this could be a reference to his intended inclusion (or indeed, exclusion).

given the terrible sins she has committed against it. She is therefore complicit in her flight, and consents to joining the Argonauts; Jason is not so much the *raptor* but the facilitator.

A further consideration is an intertextual one, and involves a potential marker in the text which is in place to prompt us to look back at earlier works, in comparison to the present work. Absyrtus' use of the evocative word *uestigia* (8.266) in the aftermath of the wedding has connotations of poetological significance. Phaethon is Absyrtus' nickname, and Ovid explored the implications of the word *uestigia* in telling Phaethon's story, involving the Chariot of the Sun.<sup>111</sup> The intertext is clear, and Valerius is reminding us once again that although the story may be familiar, we are on a new pathway when reading his epic. For other examples of *uestigia* being used in the text, see also Pelias going over every step of his son Adrastus after he's been tricked into joining the Argonauts (1.711); the men looking wistfully at Hercules' empty seat (3.721); during the narrator's story of Io (4.394); and as Medea presses her face into the tracks left in the bedclothes from where she was sleeping (8.8). All of these could be seen as poetological, offering a comment on the new version of the text versus previous versions, as they force us to consider what the previous tracks might have looked like and indeed where they led, in comparison with this Valerian journey.<sup>112</sup> Absyrtus' words therefore reinforce not only the plight of Peuce, but they highlight the changes Valerius has made to earlier versions of the

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<sup>111</sup> Ov. *Met.* (2.1-400). Newlands (1995) discusses the 'well-known poetological signification' of this word.

<sup>112</sup> See OLD s.v. *uestigium* 5c 'following another's footsteps'. Statius also recognises the significance of *uestigia* in his description of Capaneus, a character which Statius deals with in a self-conscious way. As Capaneus battles the Thebans in a gigantomachic flurry in book 10, he is described as *uacuoque sub aere pendens / plana uelut terra certus uestigia figat, / tendit et ingenti subit occurrente ruina* ('in the empty air, as though he were planting firm and level footsteps on earth, upwards he goes in the face of a mighty avalanche,' *Theb.* 10.861-3). On this, see Leigh (2006, plus bibliography). Statius' *sphragis* is also concerned with following in the footsteps of a predecessor: *uiue, precor; nec tu diuinam Aeneida tempta, / sed longe sequere et uestigia semper adora* (*Theb.* 12-816-7). On this, see Dominik (2003).

story, and make further suggestions to us that in order to unpick and understand what is going on during the wedding scenes, comparisons to earlier versions must be made. There is also a hint of transgression here, too, in that the result of such comparisons highlights not only Valerius' poetic transgressions in veering away from the earlier version, but it also reveals the truly transgressive nature of the scenes on Peuce. Valerius is not walking in the tracks of other poets; he has constructed a new wedding scene for Jason and Medea which vaunts their transgressive relationship, and the transgressive nature of this epic.

By lending the island a mythological history involving sexual violence and a mythical *raptor*, the river Hister, Valerius' audience is made to feel even more uneasy about the already difficult and troubling union of Jason and his new bride. Furthermore, Valerius then puts into the mouth of Absyrtus a speech contrasting Jason to yet another *raptor* from mythology. What Valerius has achieved by rewriting the wedding scene to include such unpleasantness is to make the rape of Peuce highly reminiscent of what Medea is actually experiencing. But there is more to it than that. Where the threat of a second abduction, that is a legal one carried out by her own people, is averted in Apollonius through the timely intervention and support of Queen Arete, Valerius truncates the journey away from Colchis and removes the possibility (and indeed necessity) of this taking place. Instead, the pair marry in scenes of apparent calm and celebration, but the sinister undertones presented by Valerius undermine these positive sentiments. In contrast to Apollonius, here we have abduction upon abduction, rape upon rape, as Valerius subtly layers the different kinds of transgression which have occurred here.

## **2: The island of Peuce: rape, metamorphosis, recompense?**

It is clear by shifting the location of Jason and Medea's wedding to the island of Peuce, Valerius Flaccus vaunts the transgressive nature of their union. Peuce is an island with a disturbing history involving sexual violation, aspects of which speak to Medea's own experience as she leaves her homeland. In order that the stories of their later lives together might take place, they have to marry: stories of the ramifications of the dissolution of that marriage are famous, themselves involving violated expectations, and shocking events which overturn the natural order. In Valerius' poem as we have it, the wedding on Peuce is the climax to a story which routinely breaks boundaries. The conflation of transgressions which take place at Peuce therefore compel us to think about the nature of the relationship into which Jason and Medea are entering, as presented by the Roman poet.

However, aside from the story of the sexual violation itself, Peuce is also transgressive in other ways. The very status of Peuce is in question, with confusion over how and why the nymph and island are connected. This further highlights the transgressive elements of the scene, and pushes us to begin to think about what sort of world Valerius is creating in his epic. It seems that Peuce may be a hybrid form, or that the boundaries of what she is, or was, no longer have their initial integrity, and she has somehow been transformed into something else – from nymph, to feature of the landscape upon which Jason and Medea may stage their wedding. We now turn to investigate the confusing status of Peuce, to consider further whether the harrowing sexual violation she has suffered at some point in the past relates in some way to her subsequent loss of identity, and thus contributes further to her transgressive status.

Valerius' first introduction of the island highlights this situation: *insula Sarmaticae Peuce stat nomine nymphe* (8.217). The introduction may be short, but it successfully links the island to the nymph which shares its name. It seems the name is both the identifier of something anthropomorphic and something in the landscape, all at once. The next mention of Peuce describes, once again concisely, the sexual attack on the nymph herself, and occurs just as the couple ratify their union (8.255-6).<sup>1</sup> These provocative titbits constitute the entirety of the information offered by Valerius on Peuce, and as such, this prompts consideration of the status of Peuce, and how this is connected to the sexual attack. Whilst it is made clear that the island is named after her, there is no hint as to whether the nymph somehow transformed into the island following the attack, or if there is some other explanation. Peuce is therefore a transgressive entity, and difficult to pin down.

'Peuce the island' and 'Peuce the nymph' are undoubtedly enmeshed, and must be considered together. A starting point in attempting to identify Peuce's status involves investigating the name of the island itself for any etymological intrigue, as well as a consideration of the traditional nature of nymphs in general. The island's appearances in other literature are also of importance, since a progression in the way it is described and classified can be discerned. Each successive progression prompts the re-evaluation of Peuce's role in Valerius. The potential process of transformation from nymph to feature of the landscape is itself of interest, since a potential metamorphosis such as this is reminiscent of many of the stories in Ovid's works, a poet who himself demonstrates an interest in sexual violation.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, once the reader has negotiated the text and reached the wedding scene, a retrospective glance back over the text reveals that hints of the wedding on Peuce are to be found in two

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<sup>1</sup> See above.

<sup>2</sup> See Forbes Irving (1990) on metamorphoses in Greek myth.

specific episodes in the text, indicating that reading the poem in the light of this event helps to gain further insights into the transgressive nature of the work. Valerian intertexts with Virgil, oft explored, are enhanced by intertexts with Ovid's rapes and abductions, references which reveal that the liminal status of Peuce links in with the events which take place there.<sup>3</sup> These connections tie in with the overarching theme of transgression which Valerius is keen to exploit in his work, and help to explain further why he chose to use this mysterious island as a stage for such an important part of the protagonists' journey.

## 2.1 Descriptions of Peuce in other texts

In attempting to resolutely pin down the mysterious status of Peuce, a number of steps may be taken. The name Peuce itself is shared by both island and nymph, and as such it is a natural starting point from which to begin an investigation. Etymologically, the name is of intrigue, since in ancient Greek, the word *πέυκη* means 'pine tree'.<sup>4</sup> It may appear that this simply names a particular landscape feature: perhaps the island was covered in pine trees, and this is how its name arises. However in neither of the *Argonauticas* is there a hint of trees being present on the island, nor is Peuce the nymph explicitly connected with trees. At first sight, the

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<sup>3</sup> Hinds (1998, 143) observes, 'the Virgiliocentric history of epic construction and reception [. . .] had already in Flavian times taken firm hold, and had declined to take the Ovidian experiment to the mainstream of the genre'. Hardie, Barchiesi, and Hinds (1999, 5) 'The foregrounding of the body also helps to bring into focus the importance of the *Metamorphoses* for what will become an obsession of later first-century AD Latin literature with physical violence and bodily disintegration, and with an anxiety about the transgression of boundaries that is expressed at the level both of the human individual and of the corporate state, the body politic of Rome.' However the significance of Ovid in Valerius Flaccus is now beginning to be explored. See Stover (2003) and Davis (2009) for important investigations.

<sup>4</sup> Σ AR 4.310 credits Eratosthenes with the name. See above for discussion of the etymology of Drepane, the wedding site in Apollonius.

association appears vague in this regard.<sup>5</sup> In fact, it may be that Peuce's name is a building block in the construction of a *locus amoenus*: a place of beauty, and of risk.<sup>6</sup> It has been noted that the most prolific landscape featured in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a text replete with rape narratives, is 'sylvan' in nature: 'a secluded grove, quiet water, shade, coolness, soft grass, sometimes rocks or a cavern, are the usual attributes'.<sup>7</sup> It is just such a scene of tranquillity and safety from which Hylas is famously abducted,<sup>8</sup> so the audience is already alert to the dangers of such places. However the Argonauts, being unaware of both Hylas' demise, and unfamiliar with the nature of exotic locations (being as this is the first sea journey), are ignorant of these hazards. The wedding scene on Peuce takes place in a tranquil cave, and at first glance there are no trees or water described in the scene. But through the name Peuce itself, trees are omnipresent, rather than being described as physically present. The trees are in the very name of the island/nymph, and so in fact they form an overarching theme, arguably underpinning everything transgressive (or at the very least, sexual) which might occur in connection with Peuce.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, rather than being a tranquil, clear stream (such as confronts Hylas: *gratos amnes*, 3.557), the only body of water in the Peuce scene is in fact a violent rapist, the Hister (who is himself characterised as *saevos*, 8.219); thus the threat of an ominous result when

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<sup>5</sup> See Gibson (2006, 243-4) on the unknown location of the island. Trees are often sacred to deities; for example, see the story of Erysichthon (Call. *H.* 6.31-117, Ov. *Met.* 8.738-878). Trees have also been shown to have metapoetic resonances in Latin epic; for example, Masters (1992, 27) sees the decimation of the grove by Caesar (Luc. *BC* 3.399-452) as a 'metaphor for the plundering of poetic material from another source'; on this see also Hinds (1998, 10-14). Gowers (2011) studies the metaphoric meanings of tree in *Georgics* 2 and the *Aeneid*.

<sup>6</sup> See above. Parry (1964, 276-7) discusses the pastoral landscape as virginal in itself and the way it prefigures rape; see Hinds (1987, 35) on the *locus amoenus* as a 'place of performance', and McIntyre (2008) on the *locus amoenus* in Imperial literature.

<sup>7</sup> Segal (1969, 4). Cohen (2007, 315-6) comments that 'despite enticing attractions that nature holds for girls, danger lurks around every corner'.

<sup>8</sup> 3.565-740 and 4.1-57. On Hylas in Valerius, see Garson (1963), Heerink (2007), and McIntyre (2008, 102-9). Murgatroyd (1992) discusses the setting in six versions of the myth.

<sup>9</sup> On wordplay generally, see Ahl (1985), and specifically in Ovid, see Boyd (2001) and Keith (2001).

lingering in such a location gives way to the more immediate act of rape itself.<sup>10</sup> Even the name of this island is evocative therefore, signifying the omnipresent nature of trees, a contributor to the *locus amoenus* in which Jason and Medea marry. The intricate connection between the name of the location and the actions of the River Hister are a conflation of features which signify the transgressive nature of the location.<sup>11</sup>

A further factor to consider before widening the net to explore the rest of the poem is the marital status of nymphs; a pertinent issue given that the island upon which Jason and Medea marry is associated with such a creature. Marriage for the ancient Greeks was intrinsically linked with virginity,<sup>12</sup> and Apollonius' Alcinous highlights the problematic nature of Medea's status as unmarried (*parthenos*) by proclaiming that if she is a virgin, she should be returned to her father (AR 4.1106-9). This is the major reason for the couple's rushed matrimony in that version. Medea is also a *parthenos* in Valerius' epic,<sup>13</sup> but here they enjoy a leisurely celebration of their union, and one which takes place voluntarily.<sup>14</sup> Medea's imminent transition from *parthenos* to married woman could in fact be comparable to the nymph's experience, since nymphs were characteristically sexual creatures. Indeed, as late as in Ovid the word *nympha* may still have had connections with the archaic Greek meaning of bride or nubile woman.<sup>15</sup> We can see therefore that the mention of a nymph at 8.217 in connection with the marriage may have a double meaning: the marriage of Medea, which we know will happen, and something of a sexual nature

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<sup>10</sup> Note that Hylas is abducted by the nymphs because of his sexual attractiveness: Juno makes this clear as she announces his arrival to the nymphs (3.535-44). See also AR 1.1207-39, and Propertius 1.20.

<sup>11</sup> See Segal (1969, 15) on woods in Ov. *Met.* as the 'setting for the fateful encounter with divine powers, occasionally helpful, but more often hostile'.

<sup>12</sup> Karakantza (2003, 16-17).

<sup>13</sup> *castis lucis* (5.535) confirms Medea's virginity: Wijsman (1996, 169); Spaltenstein (2004, 474).

<sup>14</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, 213-4).

<sup>15</sup> Davis (1983, 52), who points out that *nympha* and *nubere* are juxtaposed in *Heroides* 5.12.



occurring in connection to Peuce the nymph. The sexual encounter experienced by the nymph is a transgressive violation, and yet Jason and Medea choose to marry in the sinister scene of the act itself. In a way, Medea's first sexual encounter is also a violation, since in the eyes of her mother and father<sup>16</sup> and brother (not to mention her betrothed),<sup>17</sup> she has been 'abducted' by Jason.

The confusing nymph/island status of Peuce is one highlighted by other writers, too. The triangular shape of the island, as described by Apollonius (4.309-13), may be a hint at the island's gender.<sup>18</sup> The vocabulary used by Apollonius, ἐέργεται ('enclosed', 'shut in', AR 4.309), gives us a further clue to Peuce's position in the river. The image is a claustrophobic one, implying the power of the river and the powerlessness of the island. This may have given rise to the idea of the river constantly engulfing the island as it flowed, an image which might have led to one of Peuce being overcome by the body of water, and thereafter onto the connotation of sexual violence. Whereas Apollonius makes no direct link between the nymph and the island,<sup>19</sup> Roman writers both before and after Valerius do connect them. Prior to Valerius, Lucan also mentions Peuce, as he describes the nations which become involved in the civil war between Caesar and Pompey: *et barbara Cone, | Sarmaticas ubi perdit aquas sparsamque profundo | multifidi Peucen unum caput adluit Histri* ('and barbarous Cone, where one mouth of the much-divided Danube loses its Sarmatian waters and washes Peuce, sprinkled by the deep, BC 3.200-2, trans. Braund).<sup>20</sup> In common with Apollonius' account, this example is rather less dark and disturbing than that of Valerius, as once again it does not allude to a personified

<sup>16</sup> Medea's mother laments her departure in a lengthy speech (8.140-70).

<sup>17</sup> Absyrtus makes his anger at the situation clear (8.259-84).

<sup>18</sup> See above.

<sup>19</sup> See Nelis (2001, 57) on the aetiology of the island of Ortygia (*Aen.* 3.692-6) which involves the river-god Apheus raping the nymph Arethusa, and the link to Apollonius' aetiological account of Philyra (AR 2.1231-41).

<sup>20</sup> Driving rivers can signify violence (Segal 1969, 27).

nymph in connection to the island; we do however see an explicit mention of the river and the Sarmatians. Being described as ‘divided’ enhances the idea of the island’s isolation, and may add to the idea of the island being subjected to and overcome by the constant flow of the river, thus leading to the rape legend. Statius picks up the idea of waters ‘enclosing’ or ‘surrounding’ Peuce once again, but develops this further: *an te septenus habebit | Hister et umbroso circumflua coniuge Peuce?* (‘Or will the sevenfold Hister possess you and Peuce around whom flows her shadowy husband?’ *Silv.* 5.2.136-7, trans. Gibson).<sup>21</sup> In this text, which was composed after Valerius’ poem,<sup>22</sup> we find that the notion of some sort of conflation between nymph and island has endured, since Statius here describes Peuce as possessing a *coniunx*.<sup>23</sup> It is difficult for us to imagine an island having a spouse, so perhaps Statius is here alluding to the next steps in Peuce’s existence. In the aftermath of the ordeal Peuce suffered in the past before Jason and Medea’s wedding (as told in Valerius), she was eventually joined in matrimony to the river, her attacker. Valerius, as we have seen, chooses to give us a window onto the violent beginnings of this ‘relationship’ later expanded upon by Statius, by allowing us brief access to the vestige of Peuce’s experiences just as Jason marries Medea.

The literary references collected above seem to suggest that where discussion of the existence and status of Peuce is concerned, a progression takes place. We

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<sup>21</sup> See Gibson (2006, 243-5) for further on Statius’ use of this myth here; he argues that the spousal element to the story is ‘in-keeping with the story of the nymph Peuce and the river-god referred to by Valerius Flaccus’. Segal (1969, 4) points out that shadows and shade are an important factor in Ovid during scenes of sexual violation. This may be shade sought to take shelter from the heat of the midday sun (for example in *Amores* 1.5), or tales of lust taking place in midday heat (see tales of Io, Callisto, Arethusa, Hyacinthus and Circe in the *Metamorphoses* – see Segal 1969, 8), or the shade in which Pyramus and Thisbe frolic (*Met.* 4.88 and 116), or the shade which Scylla rejects (*Met.* 14.52), enjoying as she does to sunbathe. For Segal (1969, 78), shade offered pastoral safety in Virgil, but danger in Ovid.

<sup>22</sup> On Statius as a user of Argonautic elements from Apollonius and Valerius, see Stover (2009b), and Parkes (2009).

<sup>23</sup> Gibson (2006, 244): ‘the epithet *umbroso* applied to Peuce’s consort (*coniuge*) [*Silv.* 5.2.137], the Danube, is explicable in terms of the pine trees which grew on the island’.

begin with the presence of an island in the Danube delta, being engulfed by the river. Then a connection via name to a nymph from Sarmatia is made, with the suggestion that the nymph was ravaged by the river, and that she eventually became married to it. Confusingly, we are still no closer to understanding how the nymph and island became conflated in the first place. How did the entities of island and nymph become so enmeshed that Statius can refer to Peuce as having a ‘husband’ without the need for further explanation? The notion of the island’s transformation, or perhaps its hybridity, underpins the unstable nature of boundaries in this text. The circumstances surrounding this transformation, if this is indeed what occurred, may further underpin the transgressive elements already discussed, and reinforce Valerius’ reason for choosing the island on which to stage a seminal event in the lives of his protagonists.

There are a few possibilities in this regard. Perhaps the Sarmatian nymph was attacked in the cave in which Valerius’ Jason and Medea wed, on the as-yet-unnamed island which subsequently took her name. Perhaps the pine-covered terrain of the island lent her the name Peuce, replacing an earlier name. Another theory could be that the nymph was attacked whilst she was bathing in the river, and was somehow metamorphosed into the island, thus forever merging the name of island and nymph. One effect of this might be that such naming memorialises her, perhaps representing some kind of recompense for her terrible plight. The name could therefore be some kind of compensation. Perhaps the river god offered her the island, or changed her into it; perhaps she found a way to transform herself into an island, or some other deity did this to try and help her, or punish her. Valerius does not offer an explanation in the *Argonautica*;<sup>24</sup> nevertheless the swift movement from an

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<sup>24</sup> Though Wijsman (2000, 218) discusses the mention of Peucon (6.564) whose hair is river reeds; he concludes that Peuce the water nymph is the warrior’s mother, and therefore Hister may be his father. At the time of Peucon’s death, the unnamed mother is described as being in a Maeotian cave (*Maeotis*

introduction of the island named ‘after a Sarmatian nymph’ to the snapshot of a sexual attack at the hands of the river-husband which now ‘embraces’ her (nodding at Apollonius, and to which Statius will later nod), prompts the reader to consider quite how Peuce acquired her name and history. The ramifications of the violent attack to which she was subjected, the knowledge of which Valerius allows but which Statius elides,<sup>25</sup> are also to be considered.

To advance the investigation further, the motives for both allowing the main characters to marry in such an unpleasant location and for building these aspects into the wedding scene in the first place, must be considered. To do so, and in the absence of further information, it is necessary to hypothesise what exactly did happen to Peuce in the aftermath of the assault, and try to draw some conclusions from this conflation of unpleasantness at such a crucial point in the text. Having exhausted all the evidence in book 8 of our primary text, we must now turn to earlier books of the poem to see whether Valerius gives us any hint of the horror to come, hints which may only be unlocked once the events of book 8 are revealed. In addition, having surveyed the specific references to Peuce in other post-Augustan literature, we must now refer to other Roman writers to discover how they deal with the themes of rape, sexual attack and marriage. By reading Valerius against a backdrop of earlier accounts of such violations, an instruction perhaps given by Valerius’ use of *uestigia* in the aftermath of the wedding, it is possible to open up the *Argonautica* and understand more fully his interrogation of transgressive themes. What follows will demonstrate that Valerius has included these plot points precisely to invite his

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*antris*, 6.565), lamenting her son’s loss. It is by no means certain that Peuceon’s mother is Peuce, but if she is, then her status is thrown into further confusion.

<sup>25</sup> Unless this is a Statian negative allusion to Valerius! See Zissos (1999b) on Valerius’ use of this technique.

audience to make comparisons to earlier texts, and to ask questions about the unfortunate outcome of Peuce in relation to Medea.

## **2.2 Shadows of the future: *Argonautica* 1 and the Ovidian connection**

Whereas initially the mention of Peuce as wedding venue seems to be nothing more than a combination of plot necessity, a display of geographical erudition on the part of the poet, and an assertion of literary independence from Apollonius, it is clear that this is not the whole story. Peuce's sudden reintroduction as the nymph, despite the brevity of the episode, is striking. The nymph's terrifying ordeal is juxtaposed with the happy event of the wedding, and the scene is therefore provocative, despite the unclear outcome of the nymph in the wake of the attack. Why does Valerius choose to conflate all of these elements at such a devastatingly important moment? The keys to attempting to unpick this complicated scenario is to widen the investigation beyond book 8, and then beyond the poem itself. It then becomes clear that Valerius ingeniously links together a chain of rape narratives in his poem, which culminate at the story of Jason and Medea's wedding, further enhancing its transgressive nature.

One hypothesis in the sharing of the name Peuce between island and nymph is that at some point the nymph *became* the island. Of interest is whether there was a transformation or metamorphosis involved in Peuce's ordeal. Transformations and rape, both involving the dissolution of boundaries in some way, were topics explored by the Augustan poet Ovid across a number of his works. His *Metamorphoses*, an epic poem on the transformation of the bodies of humans, demigods and gods into trees, plants, flowers, animals or features of the landscape, is the most obvious work

to which we must refer if we wish to discuss a transformation of any sort.<sup>26</sup> The number of rape narratives in Ovid's works is striking, and they repeatedly challenge the reader looking for meaning.<sup>27</sup> Ovid also deals in memorialisation and recompense, particularly when dealing with rape, in his elegies on the Roman calendar, the *Fasti*.<sup>28</sup> We shall evaluate Ovid's rape narratives and compare them to Valerius' work, in an effort to discover whether any pertinent links can be made. This analysis will in turn shed further light on the nymph Peuce and her potential outcome, and then the need for her involvement at Jason and Medea's wedding. It will become clear that Valerius may well have had an eye on Ovid when writing important scenes throughout the *Argonautica*, and activating intertextual links between with the earlier Augustan works helps to reveal fully the fate of Peuce. When reading these earlier scenes after reading about Peuce, our understanding of the gravity of the situation is enhanced, and further augmented when activating intertextual links with Ovid. When reading the scene on Peuce these hints and links to stories in Ovid's works (and to those of others), we will see that the island was in fact the natural choice for Jason and Medea's wedding. Making these comparisons will strengthen the argument that Peuce was indeed raped by the river, and that a metamorphosis more than likely then took place, emphasising boundary dissolution, and thus transgression, yet further.

In the wake of reading to the end of the poem as we have it, it is possible to see retrospectively repeated hints of the future as early as in *Argonautica* book 1, as Jason begins to ponder how he will tackle the challenge ahead. He wishes for

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<sup>26</sup> See Skinner (2005, 226) on Ovid as 'strategic forerunner of imperial age poets who score points by going to extremes'.

<sup>27</sup> Richlin (1992, 161) identifies over fifty instances of rape in the 15 books of the *Metamorphoses*, and ten in the 6 books of the *Fasti*. Skinner (2005, 226) discusses Ovid's 'suspiciously many' rapes, calling the act an 'ugly business'. Rimell (2006, 7) discusses the intrinsic nature of Ovid's rapes, an act which 'opens' the *Amores* (*Am.* 1.5), *Ars Amatoria* (*Ars.* 1.101-34), and *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 1.452-567).

<sup>28</sup> Murgatroyd (2005, chapter 3).

transgressive equipment used previously by Perseus and Triptolemus, both characters with links to rape: Perseus was a product of rape, and Triptolemus' plough was commissioned by Demeter in celebration for her return, following her rape at the hands of Pluto, which took place on another three-cornered isle: not Peuce, but Sicily. Furthermore, at the moment of Jason's musings over the unknowable journey he faces, we are given a textual prompt in *creditur* ('it is believed') that the stories of the paradigms to which he refers in his wishes appear elsewhere, and prominently, they appear in elegiac works of Ovid. The earlier poet's use of these characters evokes savage rivers, amatory themes, and the use of the very flying machine which Medea uses to eventually escape Jason after the breakdown of their marriage. As he wishes for transgressive equipment at the outset of the poem, Jason is also crossing from the epic to the elegiac, collapsing the boundaries between the genres. Furthermore, in the light of the layers of transgression detailed in the scenes on Peuce, Jason's initial transgressive wishes are seen to be even more ironic, contributing as they do to the world without boundaries which Valerius is keen to construct.

Jason cannot imagine how he might be able to cross the sea. He has no concept of the idea of a ship, since at this point such vessels have not yet been invented: indeed, Valerius reminds us of the primacy of the *Argo* in the opening lines of the work.<sup>29</sup> In pondering the journey Jason instead wishes for items which are within the boundaries of his imagination, but, absurdly, they remain unobtainable for they are mythological:

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<sup>29</sup> See chapter 6.

*nunc aerii plantaria uellet*

*Perseos aut currus et quos frenasse dracones*

*creditur, ignaras Cereris qui uomere terras*

*imbuit<sup>30</sup> et flaua quercum damnauit arista.*

(‘now he wished for Perseus’ winged sandals, or that he had bridled the fabled car and dragons of that man who, it is believed, was the first to plough the lands that did not know Ceres, and preferred the golden ear to the acorn’, 1.67-70).

The pieces of equipment he desires are Perseus’ winged sandals and Triptolemus’ flying plough, both of which would enable him to fly. Such desires are already transgressive, though thoroughly out of reach.<sup>31</sup> The personnel involved in his thoughts are of note: the great mythological hero Perseus is the son of Danae, and pertinently, he is himself the product of rape.<sup>32</sup> Danae was imprisoned by her father Akrisios but found by Zeus, who had sexual relations with her. When her father discovered her pregnancy he punished both Danae and her child, an element of the myth often represented as the king locking them both in a chest and throwing them into sea.<sup>33</sup> It could be said that as Jason wishes to be like Perseus, associations are made immediately with rape. This is reinforced by his wish for Triptolemus’ plough, for he plays a prominent part in the wider story of the rape of Persephone, also known as Kore (in her guise as vegetation goddess) or Proserpina in Latin (and

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<sup>30</sup> The *OLD* shows that *imbuo* can also mean inaugurate and ‘to give (a person, etc) initial instruction, experience, etc., (in)’ and thus can have the force of doing something for the first time, a theme which resonates with transgression in itself.

<sup>31</sup> On technology and transgression, see chapter 6.

<sup>32</sup> See Scafuro (1990, 128) on the ‘language of sexual union’ used in Euripides’ *Danae*.

<sup>33</sup> See Scafuro (1990, 129-30) on Danae’s story.



henceforth here).<sup>34</sup> Proserpina was abducted by Pluto (her paternal uncle) as she was picking flowers in a beautiful meadow.<sup>35</sup> She ate the pomegranate whilst a resident in the Underworld, meaning that she must forever live there for a part of the year. The myth is linked to the explanation of the changing seasons, as Proserpina is Demeter's daughter, a goddess associated with Roman Ceres. Ovid tells the story extensively in various works.<sup>36</sup> When Demeter secures her daughter's release, she instructs Triptolemus in the art of agriculture and sends him around the world in a chariot to introduce the process to various nations. Unfortunately, upon arriving in Scythia, a king named Lyncus brings the chariot down. As a punishment for this transgression, Demeter turns the Scythian king into a lynx, and then denies the Scythians agriculture by blighting them with freezing cold climatic conditions.

Interestingly, Jason's desires are not without precedent, with the Latin word *creditur* ('it is believed', 1.69) being a sign that we need to look harder at the text. Both of these stories appear in Ovid,<sup>37</sup> and the 'belief' of their fame expressed by the narrator may be a nod towards earlier literary representations of these characters.<sup>38</sup> Jason's wishes replicate those made by Ovid's amatory narrator as he wishes to cross a flooded river to reach his girl:

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<sup>34</sup> See below for more on Proserpina.

<sup>35</sup> Hinds (1987, 31) on the sexual innuendo in Proserpina picking flowers at *Met.* 5.393-4.

<sup>36</sup> Before Valerius, the main sources for the story are to be found in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and Ovid's *Fast.* 4.393-620 and *Met.* 5.642-61. Later, Claudian's epic poem *De raptu Proserpinae* retells her story. Mentions of her are to be found throughout the corpus of Greek and Latin literature, since she was worshipped as a goddess and is therefore evoked on several occasions; for example, references to her are made in the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, in the poetry of Pindar, and the plays of Aeschylus, Aristophanes and Euripides. She is also referenced at the close of *Aeneid* 4, as Iris comes to transport Dido's spirit to the underworld (*Aen.* 4.696-9). See Hinds (1987, 51-98), who argues that the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* both engage closely with the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and Foley (1994, 152-153) who points out that there was no 'canonical' version of the myth. See below for more on Proserpina.

<sup>37</sup> Kleywegt (2005, 57); cf. Zissos (2008, ad loc.).

<sup>38</sup> On 'footnotes' of this nature in Ovid, see Conte (1986, 57-63), Hinds (1987, 17-22 and 1998, 1-16 esp.), Barchiesi (1993), and Miller (1993); on the same in Virgil, see Horsfall (1990).

*nunc ego, quas habuit pinnas Danaeius heros,  
terribili densum cum tulit angue caput,  
nunc opto currum, de quo Cerealia primum  
semina uenerunt in rude missa solum.*

(‘Now I long for the wings which the hero son of Danae had,  
when he carried the terrible snaky head,  
now I want the chariot, from which Ceres’ seeds  
came, sent onto the untilled ground’, *Am.* 3.6.13-16).<sup>39</sup>

It is clear that both Jason and Ovid see the same mythical flying machines as the solution to their problems. Like Jason, Ovid is wishing for these pieces of equipment to demonstrate how one might fancifully surmount an obstacle, or collapse a boundary. In addition, both are attempting to cross a body of water. Prior to reaching his girl, Ovid is distracted by a digression into stories of other famous rivers. During this, Ovid tells the story of the plight of Ilia/Rhea Silvia, the mother of Romulus and Remus, after she has been raped by Mars. The river Anio tries to console her, but she throws herself into the river Tiber.<sup>40</sup> In the light of the scenes in Peuce where the river rapes the nymph as Jason and Medea marry, this is particularly poignant.

This intertext with a poem ostensibly about love, a playful and informal work in comparison to the grandeur of the epic, prompts consideration of the nature of the

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<sup>39</sup> Barchiesi (2006) discusses the ‘anti-Callimachean’ way in which the river is described as ‘accord[ing] with the narrative function of the stream that obstructs the amorous quest of the elegiac poet’ (Barchiesi *ibid.*, 282), adding that the story of the rape of Ilia has ‘epic provenance’. On the *Amores* as a whole, see Boyd (2002). On love in Ovid, see Sharrock (2002b). On *Am.* 3 as a book, see Hutchinson (2008, ch. 8).

<sup>40</sup> P. Davis (2006, 79-80) discusses Ovid’s focus on the aftermath of Ilia’s ordeal here.

Argonautic story to come.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, this blending of generic boundaries is intriguing, combining a story from elegy with the beginnings of this epic tale.<sup>42</sup> Whilst Jason's journey does become somewhat amatory later, this is not the purpose of it initially. In evoking wishes for the exact same equipment, Valerius draws us into making comparisons between the two texts, and prompts us to consider the possibility of a love story to follow. However, this is tempered by Ovid's later description of the rape of Ilia at the hands of a river, a digression which begins to grow in significance in the light of not only Medea's abduction, but also the events on Peuce at the ratification of her relationship with Jason.

Another reference of note here is Ovid's mention of Medusa. Perseus was famous for slaying the Gorgon Medusa, but her story is disquieting. Medusa loses her identity when she is raped by Neptune (*Met.* 4.790-803), and turns into a sculptress of sorts in gaining the power of turning others into stone, thus forcing them to lose their identities, too.<sup>43</sup> Her gaze is where her power lies: in looking at her victims, they become petrified.<sup>44</sup> Loss of identity is a feature common to ancient rape narratives, and it could be that the nymph Peuce, on being attacked by the river, suffered the same fate.<sup>45</sup> It certainly appears that the nymph no longer exists; at the very least, the island now uses what was once her name.

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<sup>41</sup> See James (2003) on Ovid's generic playfulness.

<sup>42</sup> On Valerius' interplay with Propertius 1.20, for example, see Heerink (2007). On Martial's criticisms of epic and use of the Argonautic myth (and, more specifically, Valerius' version thereof), see Zissos (2004c).

<sup>43</sup> See Rimell (2006, 13), who goes on (*ibid.*, 32) to connect the Ovidian Medea (*Met.* 7.203-298) with Medusa, calling her a 'Medusan serpent-slayer'. Robson (1997, 88) points out that Ovid's version of Medusa's rape has a bestial element, in the Poseidon was in disguise as a bird when he attacked her.

<sup>44</sup> See Lovatt (forthcoming) on Medusa's gaze, and chapter 5.3 on monsters.

<sup>45</sup> Richlin (1992, 165): 'The cutting out of Philomela's tongue is a transformative point in the tale, turning her from object of violence to perpetrator her literal metamorphoses at the end if abrupt and relatively unstressed. But Philomela's mutilation has much in common with the metamorphoses suffered by many victims in the poem (mostly female) [...] all lose the ability to speak with a human voice, if they have been turned into animals, their efforts to speak, resulting in grunts, and their horror at this, are recounted.'

Ovid goes on to repeat the formula of Perseus and Triptolemus in greater detail later in his career:

*Nunc ego Triptolemi cuperem consistere curru,  
misit in ignotam qui rude semen humum;  
nunc ego Medae uellem frenare dracones,  
quos habuit fugiens arce, Corinthe, tua;  
nunc ego iactandas optarem sumere pennas,  
siue tuas, Perseu, Daedale, siue tuas:  
ut tenera nostris cedente uolatibus aura  
aspicerem patriae dulce repente solum,  
desertaeque domus uultus, memoresque sodales,  
caraque praecipue coniugis ora meae.*

(‘Now I would wish to drive Triptolemus’ chariot,  
he who scattered seed onto new, untilled earth;  
now I’d wish to bridle Medea’s dragons,  
which she had as she was fleeing from your citadel, Corinth:  
now I’d wish to take up wings to beat,  
either yours Perseus, or yours Daedalus:  
so with the gentle air falling in my flight,  
I’d suddenly see my country’s sweet earth,  
and the faces in the home I left, familiar faces,  
and most of all my dear wife’s face’, *Trist.* 3.8.1-10).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> On the *Tristia*, see Nagle (1980), Amman (2006), McGowan (2009).

This time the poet, a much older man than he was when he composed the playful *Amores*, is writing in something of an autobiographical mode, musing over his desire for a change of place whilst he is in exile and longing to see his wife again. Here, Ovid's yearning for a *nostos* is reminiscent of the Odysseus in the *Odyssey*: he is no longer attempting to get somewhere; rather, he wishes he could return home. Ovid puts these images to the very forefront of the audience's mind by using them to open the poem, and here he deals in the characters' specific names rather than allusion and patronymics (though Perseus' mother's name is used in *Am.* 3.6, perhaps since Jupiter fathered quite so many children!). A contrast is set up between the young, playful man, the *praeceptor amoris*, and the older, regretful Ovid. The repetition of *nunc* (lines 1, 3 and 5) emphatically throws the disparity between Ovid's earlier situation and his current one into even higher relief, and the pathos which we feel is duly heightened.

Ovid's use of the same motifs in his longing to return to his homeland and loved ones adds a further dimension to Jason's own transgressive desires at the opening of the *Argonautica*. Once again, a blurring of generic boundaries is suggested. Furthermore, the fact that Ovid himself made the adjustment to include Medea in the formula in his later exile poetry suits Valerius' aims perfectly when *he* is writing about boundary crossing in the Argonautic context. Jason is a young man when he sets out to retrieve the Fleece, but through the pens of Euripides and Seneca, we also know of the events which occur in Jason's later life. An effective contrast can therefore be drawn between the older Ovid and the older Jason, in that as an older man, unlike Ovid, Jason does not long for his wife Medea, but instead will yearn for a *new* wife, who will legitimise his name in Corinth. Furthermore, in contrast to Ovid's later situation, when Jason wishes for these pieces of equipment,

he is concerned with how he and his men might reach the Fleece in order to retrieve it; there is no mention of his homecoming. His mind is entirely occupied with how his journey might begin, not stopping to consider the return journey. Ovid, on the other hand, has used the same imagery to describe his desire to reach a girlfriend, and his desire to come back from a faraway place to see his wife.<sup>47</sup> These considerations combine to make us think about Jason's own return journey, upon which he will marry Medea on Peuce, and his later life at home, where the disastrous end of his marriage will take place.

There are further Argonautic issues to take into account in *Trist.* 3.8. Ovid has modified slightly the Triptolemus/Perseus formula used in *Am.* 3.6 by adding an Argonautic nuance. Ovid's desperation to reach home is such that he wishes he had access to the same chariot and dragons which rescued Medea from Corinth (*Trist.* 3.3-4).<sup>48</sup> This is a reference to the vehicle, sent by Helios, upon which Medea escaped after killing her children. Ovid is now in Tomis, a location which is geographically proximal to Peuce, and thus in the same area as Colchis; perhaps this is the reason for his inclusion of Medea. When Medea utilises this piece of equipment, she is escaping her husband, not desperately trying to return to him. While this may lead us to question the suitability of this example for Ovid to use here, the combination of Triptolemus' plough, Perseus' sandals, and Medea's chariot also demands that we re-evaluate Jason's wishes. He does not know that he will meet and marry Medea on his journey, but the association of these technological pieces of

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<sup>47</sup> On Ovid's reuse of myth in the *Tristia*, see Claassen (2008). On Ovid and his desire to return, see Hinds (2006).

<sup>48</sup> The poet goes on to make this link between Medea and Tomis himself as he locates and describes the city in the next poem of the collection: *Nam rate, quae cura pugnacis facta Mineruae / per non temptatas prima cucurrit aquas, / impia desertum fugiens Medea parentem / dicitur his remos applicuisse uadis.* ('For on that ship, which was built under the care of pugnacious Minerva and which first journeyed through these untried waters, impious Medea, fleeing the father she deserted, was said to have set down its oars in these shallows' *Trist.* 3.9.7-10).

equipment with Medea's chariot serves as a veiled warning to Jason, and reminds us that where Ovid longed for the loving arms of his wife, Jason will wish to repel her.

Valerius makes the links between his own work and that of Ovid clear by not only including the same characters, but by using the same word for the chariot-technology: the *currus*. Triptolemus' contraption was in fact a plough which could fly through the air, bringing the gift of Demeter to the Earth. The plough, or Latin *aratrum*, is often used in the language of sexual conquest and/or marriage, perhaps due to the connection with fertility and reproduction.<sup>49</sup> Greek tragedians also used this term in their work in precisely this manner.<sup>50</sup> However the *currus* itself has connections with rape. It has been shown, for example, that the chariot is a recurring image in Greek art, vehicles often depicted as playing a central role in the abduction of women.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the wedding ceremony itself was often ritually presented as a stylised and simulated abduction.<sup>52</sup> Since Jason is eventually referred to as a *raptor*,<sup>53</sup> it is notable that he begins his journey by wishing for the very implement which makes the act of abduction and rape possible, as shown in Greek art.

When taking these factors into account, we can see that the idea of deviant sexual congress might be surreptitiously planted in the audience's minds even as Jason wonders how his future might turn out. Such ideas are intensified yet further when we recall that in *Am.* 3.6 a young and playful Ovid longs to cross a river to see

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<sup>49</sup> See Catullus *Carm.* 11.21-4 and *Aen.* 9.433-7 for examples of the plough used as the language of loss. This imagery may carry undertones of femininity or emasculation; however note that Richlin (1992, 169) on Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* 1.663-705 (on Achilles raping Deidamia whilst he is dressed as a woman) observes that Achilles' standpoint appears to be that to commit rape is to prove that one is a man: 'When we want to know the gender of the adolescent hero dressed in women's clothing, the signifier of his maleness is his ability to commit rape'. Therefore a link to sexual violence emerges: one reaffirms one's masculinity by committing rape.

<sup>50</sup> See for example Soph. *Antigone* 569.

<sup>51</sup> Cohen (1996, 119). She also points out (ibid. 131) that the 'wedding ceremony is believed to have resembled – in some cases – a formalised abduction with simulated imitations of violence, whereby the groom pretended to carry the bride off on a chariot while the bride pretended to struggle and her family to be in deep grief'.

<sup>52</sup> Cohen (1996, 123).

<sup>53</sup> See for example 8.395-9 and 8.265-6.

his lover and on the way indulges in a lengthy digression of a story involving the maiden Ilia and her plight. By connecting the Valerian scene and this Ovidian text, we have already made a mental link between the rape of a maiden and arguably the subsequent loss of her original identity when she throws herself into a river. Furthermore, since Ovid evokes Perseus indirectly through the mention of a ‘snake-headed woman’, the Gorgon Medusa, the idea of the loss of identity is reinforced. It is also important to remember that while Jason is not longing for a woman at this point in the *Argonautica*, he will meet one and marry her at the scene of a rape involving a river shortly before being branded a *raptor* himself.

To add further meaning to Jason’s wishes, we can then activate the intertext with *Trist.* 3.8. Here, using the same ideas, an older Ovid pines for his homeland, his friends and the sight of his wife’s face after he has been sent into exile. Gone is the playfulness of the earlier work, replaced instead with the sadness of separation and longing, enhanced by the contrast Ovid is demonstrating here. Meanwhile, at this early stage of the *Argonautica* Jason has not yet left his home, and so is not yet experiencing a nostalgic sense of longing or homesickness; nor will he long for the wife he eventually meets on this trip. It is clear, then, that even as Jason prepares to leave his beloved homeland and set out on his quest, Valerius hints at his future misery. He does this by having Jason wish for the same mythical equipment to help him cross the sea which Ovid wishes for in two of his elegiac poems. Crucially, these Ovidian works concern the Augustan poet specifically musing over how he might conquer seemingly insurmountable obstacles. In the end Jason does not need the flying machines: he manages to transgress the boundary, not merely a swollen river but the sea itself, in the first ship to ever exist. There are further contrasts in the imagery used here. Triptolemus’ flying plough is mobilised as part of the



celebrations and relief that Demeter<sup>54</sup> feels when Proserpina has been allowed to return to Earth by Pluto. Medea, on the other hand, gains the use of her own flying contraption once she has killed her children, and needs to escape their father Jason. Triptolemus' plough is brought down by Lyncus in Scythia, and Demeter blights that land with harsh winters; thus, what is reflected in Jason's wish for this plough is a journey to Scythia which would ultimately result in his destruction. Arguably, this is exactly what *Argo* eventually does. The relationship which will define Jason's life will begin on Peuce, the transgressive island which is waiting in the wings even at this nascent stage of the poem. Jason's early wishes therefore serve to further highlight the severity of the transgression that underlines Jason and Medea's wedding on Peuce, in later episodes of the poem.

### **2.3 The first time ever I saw your face: Jason and Medea meet**

The nymph Peuce's ordeal at the hands of the river Hister is disturbing, and in the light of this event in book 8, we have seen that retrospective hints of the ordeal are evoked in Jason's transgressive wishes as he prepares to leave Iolchos. Another instance of foreshadowing Peuce's plight is seen in another episode which takes place prior to the wedding. This scene also involves the sexual violation of a nymph at the hands of a body of water, and the description of this event is, forebodingly, juxtaposed with Jason and Medea's first meeting.<sup>55</sup> It becomes clear that the rivers

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<sup>54</sup> Note that Apollonius explains that the island of Drepane (on which Jason and Medea marry in his epic) could derive its name from the sickle which Demeter used to castrate Uranus (AR 4.982-92: see above).

<sup>55</sup> See Hunter (1993, 48-9) on Apollonius' meeting of Jason and Medea at the temple of Hecate (AR 3.956-61) as rewriting the fatal duel between Achilles and Hector in *Iliad* 22 (see 3.956-61; 1993 48-9). See also Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004, 104).

Phasis and Hister have a common mythological history involving sexual violation, and this turn of events provides another clue to the inappropriate nature of the site of Jason and Medea's wedding, throwing the transgressive nature of their union into the spotlight once again.

Prior to their first meeting, Valerius' narrator describes Medea as having been disturbed by horrific dreams, in a passage loaded with the language of monsters<sup>56</sup> and rivers:

*Forte deum uariis per noctem territa monstribus  
senserat ut pulsas tandem Medea tenebras  
rapta<sup>57</sup> toris primi iubar ad placabile Phoebi  
ibat et horrendas lustrantia flumina noctes.*

(‘By chance of the gods Medea, terrified in the night by various monsters of the gods, as soon as she had sensed the darkness had been driven away, having been snatched from her couch was going toward the sun’s first appeasing gleam and the rivers illuminating night horrors’, 5.329-32).<sup>58</sup>

Medea proceeds to the river Phasis to cleanse herself of these horrors, a practice undertaken as a ritual of purification in many works.<sup>59</sup> All indications at this stage imply that the river is a place of refuge, and somewhere to visit in times of worry.

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<sup>56</sup> See chapters 3, 4 and 5 on monsters.

<sup>57</sup> Note the passive sense of *rapta* here: already Medea is ‘snatched away’; see Spaltenstein (2004, 473).

<sup>58</sup> Stover (2003, 124) discusses the ‘generic destabilisation produced by Medea’s entrance’ as ‘formulated in terms of an instability in Jason’s masculinity’.

<sup>59</sup> Mozley (1934, 268) refers to Aesch. *Pers.* 201, Soph. *Elec.* 424, Eur. *Iph. Taur.* 41, Prop. 3.10.13, *Pers.* 2.16.

Rivers are often powerful motifs within a text, used to make meta-narrative comments or give ethnographical markers, elucidating the temperament and characteristics of the natives who inhabit its banks, or the nature of the landscape itself.<sup>60</sup> It soon becomes clear that in this story, rivers do not have benign presence, and in fact play a pivotal role in helping to construct the transgressive nature of Jason and Medea's union.

Medea makes her way to the riverside, and a simile<sup>61</sup> of telling significance is applied to her:

*his turbata minis fluuios ripamque petebat*<sup>62</sup>  
*Phasidis aequali Scythidum*<sup>63</sup> *comitante caterua.*  
*florea per uerni qualis iuga duxit Hymetti*  
*aut Sicula sub rupe choros, hinc gressibus haerens*  
*Pallados, hinc carae Proserpina iuncta Dianae,*  
*altior ac nulla comitum certante, priusquam*  
*palluit et uiso pulsus decor omnis Auerno:*  
*talis et in uittis geminae cum lumine taedae*  
*Colchis erat, nondum miseros exosa parentes*

(‘Disturbed by these threats, she sought the bank of the streams of Phasis, accompanied by a Scythian crowd. Just as Proserpina in the springtime led the dancers over Hymettus’

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<sup>60</sup> Jones (2005).

<sup>61</sup> See Fitch (1976) on Valerius’ use of similes, who describes this simile as being employed to ‘slow the pace’ of the text (ibid., 121-3).

<sup>62</sup> See Parry (1964, 270) on *petere* as a word used in Ovid’s discourse of rape in the *Metamorphoses*.

<sup>63</sup> Note that Medea’s handmaidens are here described as ‘Scythian’, a race who are presented as bitter enemies of the Colchians during the civil war of book 6. Here is a hint of Medea’s anti-patriotic transgressions to come.

flowery ridges or beneath the cliffs of Sicily, clinging to the steps of Pallas here, and there hand in hand with dear Diana, taller than they and no less able than her companions, and before she paled, and at the sight of Avernus, all her comeliness was repulsed. So fair also was the Colchian in her chaplets by the light of twin torches, while she did not yet hate unfortunate parents', 5.341-9).

Here, Medea and her handmaidens are expressly compared to Proserpina and Diana, as highlighted in the phrase *carae Proserpina iuncta Dianae* (5.345). Apollonius has an Artemis-simile for Medea, but it occurs as the couple meet at the temple of Hecate (AR 3.876-94), and therefore in a different context.<sup>64</sup> Here, the comparison between Medea and these mythological women, and in this new context, forces us to ponder its meaning and greater significance. It becomes clear that these references have been reworked in order to flag up the sexual violations to come, and in the light of events on Peuce, are a clear marker of the transgressions to be committed by the protagonists.

There are a number of correspondences to digest and unpick in this highly allusive passage. The language used to describe the party accompanying Medea to the riverbank, *comitante caterua* (5.342), is in itself evocative, being reminiscent of the scenes where Aeneas sees Dido for the first time as she is accompanied by a great crowd: *incessit magna iuuenum stipante caterua* (*Aen.* 1.497). There the narrator compares Dido to Diana (*Aen.* 1.498-504).<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Dido's preparations to

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<sup>64</sup> On the moving of the similes giving the first meeting 'wider meanings for the whole coming love-affair', see Fitch (1976, 123); he does not investigate further the nature of these meanings.

<sup>65</sup> On this association lending Jason and Medea's first meeting a 'tragic' undertone, see Fitch (1976, 123).

leave her quarters on the day of the hunt, and thus of her ‘marriage’ to Aeneas, are also recalled: *tandem progreditur, magna stipante caterua* (*Aen.* 4.136-7). Both of these references not only underpin Medea’s association with Diana, but they remind us of the disastrous union between Aeneas and Dido, who of course ‘marry’ in a cave in the presence of nymphs.<sup>66</sup> The association goes even further back, since this scene is also reminiscent of the first meeting of Odysseus and Nausicaa on Phaeacia (*Od.* 6.20-40).<sup>67</sup> Nausicaa is visited by Athena, who encourages her to visit the river to wash her clothes since they are lying ‘uncared for’, and this is unsuitable for a girl so close to her wedding day (or perhaps to an age suitable for marriage). Such a location is repeatedly utilised by the epic poet as a site for rape because the maiden is here outside the protection of her city walls; the countryside nature of the place is also evocative of fertility, eroticism and sexual potency.<sup>68</sup> Therefore the juxtaposition of external, verdant, watery setting and the meeting of two young, unmarried individuals immediately forewarn us of a potentially sinister situation.<sup>69</sup> To further underpin the Odyssean reference, Jason himself later compares Medea to Diana, the torch-bearer of the *parthenos*,<sup>70</sup> as well as of the hunt.

In these repeated associations with Diana, Medea’s virginity is highlighted, which throws the significance of her subsequent abandonment of her city into high relief. There is also the hint of venatic imagery in this association, with Virgil before Valerius exploiting the idea by having the Diana-like Dido and Aeneas rendezvous in

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<sup>66</sup> Aeneas is then compared to Diana’s brother Apollo, which underpins the inappropriateness of their match. See chapter 1.3 for more on Medea as Diana, but then as Venus, and Jason as Mars immediately prior to their wedding.

<sup>67</sup> On intimations of rape in this scene, see Keith (1999, 216-8) and Karakantza (2003, 11).

<sup>68</sup> Deacy (1997, 49), Karakantza (2003, 11-12). Richlin (1992, 165) describes bathing scenes in Ov. *Met.* as ‘incitements to lust’ and ‘an opportunity to show the body naked’.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. the scene of Hylas’ abduction: see above.

<sup>70</sup> Nausicaa is compared to Artemis, who delights in pursuing wild animals across mountainsides, and who is always accompanied by a chorus of young nymphs (*Od.* 6.101-9).

a cave on the occasion of an abandoned hunt in *Aen.* 4.<sup>71</sup> There are disturbing sexual connotations of the hunt which must be explored at this juncture, as they are relevant to Jason and Medea's own future union.<sup>72</sup> As Jason cuts the cables and begins the *Argo's* journey, he is compared to a huntsman on a wild and dangerous hunt for tiger cubs (1.489-93).<sup>73</sup> Not only does this underline the dangerous and reckless (and therefore, transgressive) nature of the Argonautic quest itself, it also shows that Jason himself is a predatory creature, a trait which clashes dangerously with the virgin-cum-huntress Medea. Her virginity is raised as a problem by Apollonius' Alcinous (AR 4.1106-9), and Valerius' own highlight of this issue comes when he reworks a passage in Apollonius (AR 3.541) to present Medea as falling into Jason's arms like a frightened dove sheltering from a hawk (8.32-6).<sup>74</sup> The hunting imagery is also extended to Peuce itself, where the Argonauts are depicted preparing a wedding feast. Though this is not unusual at a wedding party, the description of the hunt they undertake in order to furnish the feast with a banquet appears at a significant point in the text, and interplays pointedly with the personified Peuce's unexpected reintroduction:<sup>75</sup>

*mox epulas et sacra parant; siluestria laetis*

*praemia uenatu facili quaesita supersunt.*

*pars ueribus, pars undanti despumat aeno.*

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<sup>71</sup> Venus appears to her son Aeneas dressed as a huntress (*Aen.* 1.318-20) and Aeneas asks her if she is Diana *Aen.* 1.328-9)

<sup>72</sup> Cohen (1996, 123) points out that masculine behaviour was defined in war and the hunt, activities normally closed to women. On the other hand, female personality was defined by marriage, and sometimes redefined in a sinister way through rape.

<sup>73</sup> Zissos (2008, 300) understands Jason as the cubs' abductor, and therefore another hint of Jason as *raptor*. See Wijsman (2000, 73-5) on another tigercub motif, at 6.146-9.

<sup>74</sup> See Martin (1938, 140). This imagery is reminiscent of the virgin rape-victim Philomela (*Met.* 6.412-674). She is compared to a rabbit (where Tereus, is both *raptor* (6.5180 and eagle (*Met.* 6.516)), a lamb wounded by a wolf's mouth, and a dove with feathers bloodied by greedy talons (she was a virgin). See Richlin (1992, 73).

<sup>75</sup> See above.

(‘Then they prepare the feast and the sacrifice; woodland prizes abound having been sought in an easy hunt for the happy band; some cook the quarry on spits, some in a bubbling cauldron’, 8.252-4).

Attempts on virginity are often couched in hunting language,<sup>76</sup> and here, at the moment in which Medea is about to be married, in a location where a nymph was the quarry to a sexual predator, a specific reference is made to an ‘easy hunt’.<sup>77</sup> Such correspondences between beautiful settings, hunting, and rape are frequent in Ovid’s work:<sup>78</sup> for example, Callisto (*Met.* 2.401-535), a huntress associated with Diana (the goddess to whom Medea is identified by the narrator and by Jason), is described as relaxing in a *locus amoenus* before she is raped by Jove.<sup>79</sup> Callisto loses her function and purpose in life after this event, becoming hunted rather than the hunter (*Met.* 2.489-95), therefore suffering the loss of her identity and social exclusion.<sup>80</sup> Peuce the nymph becomes conflated with Peuce the island, and this could also be as a result of her ordeal.<sup>81</sup> In this way, Peuce has also lost her identity. Although neither Medea nor Peuce are characteristically represented as a huntress, Medea’s comparison to

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<sup>76</sup> Parry (1964, 70).

<sup>77</sup> Hinds (2002, 140) discusses the tension between Ovid’s repeated evocation of the spectacle of the stylised Roman *uenatio* as ‘resonating at once jarringly and aptly with the *Metamorphoses*’ characteristic articulation of the dangers of an untamed landscape’.

<sup>78</sup> Important studies on Ovid’s rapes are Parry (1964 – on violence and transformation-as-death), Stirrup (1977 – particularly on the nymph Arethusa raped by Alpheus (*Met.* 5. 585-641)), Curran (1978 – on the variety of rape narrative in Ovid), Davis (1983 –on love and the hunt), Heath (1991), and Murgatroyd (2000 and 2005, 63-95).

<sup>79</sup> Davis (1983, 55-62).

<sup>80</sup> Davis (1983, 61). See Parry (1964, 270-1) for a collection of references from the *Metamorphoses* concerning hunting.

<sup>81</sup> See Richlin (1992, 165) on the ‘analogic or developmental relationship between rape and mutilation’, and transformation as a punishment for rape; cf. Lefkowitz (1993, 17), who argues that in Greek myth ‘the gods see to it that the experience, however transient, is pleasant for mortals’, and Murgatroyd (2005, 63-95), who explores the victims of rape in Ovid’s *Fasti*, who are metamorphosed as a reward for their ordeal.

Diana as she first meets Jason evokes the twin ideas of virginity and the hunt, often a dangerous combination. Like Callisto, the nymph Peuce was hunted down and attacked, with this episode being introduced into the text at the moment of Jason and Medea's wedding, prior to which an 'easy hunt' took place.

A further Ovidian myth of metamorphosis which requires consideration here is that of Alpheus and Arethusa (*Met.* 5.585-641).<sup>82</sup> Arethusa, a nymph dedicated to Diana, has been hunting and is now bathing in the river Alpheus. The river desires the nymph, and in making Alpheus' ardour for her clear, Ovid blurs the boundaries between river and anthropomorphic entity. This is similar to the way in which Peuce is described in Valerius, both as island, and as nymph.<sup>83</sup> Alpheus uses his voice to call her (*Met.* 5.625), and then in language reminiscent of Peuce's ordeal, presses upon her (*sic me ferus ille premebat, Met.* 5.604). Diana takes pity on Arethusa and turns her into a spring, but the anthropomorphic river transforms back into his natural state and their waters are able to mingle, thus signifying both the breaking down of boundaries and a sexual violation. Alpheus is described as both river (*Met.* 5.586-91) and anthropomorphic pursuer (*Met.* 5.603-17); Arethusa is transformed in an attempt to protect her, but which only results in the facilitation of what she is trying to avoid.

There may be another level of confused status being revealed by Medea's comparison to Diana. Rather than the innocence of the victim, Ovid stresses, at times, the innocence of the *hunter*, and a cycle of 'hunter-hunted'. For example, Actaeon is innocent and ignorant when he stumbles on Diana bathing;<sup>84</sup> despite this, she still orders that he be ripped apart by his own hunting dogs (*Met.* 3.131-252). Could Jason, in fact, be being set up as an innocent and unknowing hunter in all of

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<sup>82</sup> Stirrup (1977, 172).

<sup>83</sup> Presumably Hister was also anthropomorphic when he caught up with Peuce, following the chase signified by the adjective used to describe her, *anhelantem*.

<sup>84</sup> Heath (1991, 241).



this? The language used to introduce Medea's scene at the riverside, is doubly relevant in this regard. Medea 'was seeking' (*petebat*, 5.341) the river as she approached, a word which has been identified as used during venatic rape scenes in Ovid.<sup>85</sup> The description of her handmaidens as Scythian (5.342) is also striking in this regard, for the Scythians were known for their eccentric hunting practices. Virgil, in his comparison of African and Scythian hunting practices (*G.* 3.339-83) describes how they wait for their quarry to be buried to the neck in snow, rendering them immobile, before killing them with knives at close range (*G.* 3.371-5). Perhaps, then, the man portrayed as the hunter is in fact the hunted, here. Medea leaves Colchis not under duress, but in the knowledge that she cannot stay now that she has betrayed her people. Eventually, she will punish Jason for his transgressions, all the while in some respects undergoing her own metamorphosis: from loyal wife to monstrous killer of her own children; Jason gains nothing by taking her from Colchis, and is entirely ignorant of what is to come. Peuce's own mysterious double nature is also resonant here, and the layers of transgression which permeate the scene at Peuce are once again augmented.

Despite the fact that the descriptions of Peuce and Hister are not as detailed as characters in the Ovidian myth, there are clear connections. By taking Medea's comparison to Diana as a textual marker, we are prompted to consider those other nymph followers of Diana who suffered at the hands of rapists in Ovid.<sup>86</sup> Here we see that this earlier myth involving a river and nymph resulted in a rape, and then a metamorphosis, strengthening the idea that the same fate befell Peuce, the island upon which Medea will marry. Medea's highly allusive comparison to Diana is greatly significant, beyond indicating a move away from Apollonius' interpretation

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<sup>85</sup> See Parry (1964, 270) on *petere* as a word used in Ovid's discourse of rape in the *Metamorphoses*.

<sup>86</sup> Note that Diana has her own troubled relationship with water, in that she was discovered by Actaeon while bathing (*Met.* 3.185). See Parry (1964, 279).

of events. In fact it takes us one step further toward understanding the level to which transgression pervades the text, and of Peuce as an appropriate scene to play out these ideas.

There are further correspondences to consider in this important scene of firsts. As well as to Diana, Medea is also compared to Proserpina.<sup>87</sup> Medea's links to Diana are foreboding enough, but those to Proserpina go on to enhance the sinister nature of her future yet further. The tranquil nature of the riverside scene is reflected in the description of the springtime landscape<sup>88</sup> on Sicily in which Proserpina played immediately prior to her abduction.<sup>89</sup> The mention of flowers evokes the mythological idea of women being carried off whilst engaged in their collection.<sup>90</sup> It is to Proserpina's state at this very moment, just prior to 'growing pale' (*palluit*, 5.347) at the sight of her *raptor* Pluto, that Medea's own condition is compared.<sup>91</sup> Jason will be described as Medea's *raptor*,<sup>92</sup> and the depiction of Medea enjoying the

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<sup>87</sup> The myth is recounted at *Met* 5.341-661 and *Fast.* 4.393-620. See Hinds (1987, 1-98) on the close intertextual engagement between representations of the myth in the Ovidian works and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; see Foley (1994) for further discussion of the *Hymn*, and for an extensive list of other versions of the myth (*ibid.*, 30).

<sup>88</sup> Segal (1969, 7) points out that Ovid delays Proserpina's entrance into the narrative by concentrating on the landscape; Zissos (1999a) discusses audience and Calliope's role as story-teller of the Proserpina narrative in *Ov. Met.*, and considers the roles of other rape victims in the same narrative, such as Cyane, as well as the analysing how earlier versions are rejuvenated or reworked by Ovid. See Hinds (2002, 127-8) on the proliferation of landscape descriptions in the first five books of the *Metamorphoses*, corresponding to the highest number of rape stories, all of which take place in 'essentially interchangeable *loca amoena*'.

<sup>89</sup> As Foley (1994, 36) points out, in the Sicilian version of the myth Proserpina is abducted into a cave, a landscape feature which plays a significant role on Peuce at Jason and Medea's wedding. As Lovatt (forthcoming) discusses, Proserpina is connected with Medea during her *teichoscopy* (6.490-4), where lilies (the flowers gathered by Ovid's Proserpina) evoke Medea's innocence, and the image of *epithalamia* is evoked. On this scene, see Stover (2003, 127).

<sup>90</sup> Foley (1994, 33).

<sup>91</sup> See Prop. 1.1.22-3, where witches are exhorted: *en agedum dominae mentem conuertite nostrae / et facite illa meo palleat ore magis* ('Come now, convert the mind of my mistress, and make her grow more pale than my own face'). See Sharrock (1994) on pallor as 'erotic topos' and the number of ways in which this exhortation might be misread by the witch, the invocation of whom resonates with Medea's own status here, as she goes pale at the sight of her *raptor*, like Proserpina.

<sup>92</sup> *neque enim fugit aequore raptor / Iuppiter aut falsi sequimur uestigia tauri*. ('nor is this ravisher Jove fleeing over the sea, nor do we follow the tracks of a false bull,' 8.265-6). See above for more analysis of this scene.

frivolity immediately before catching sight of Jason is powerfully evocative, and lending a sense of the Colchian experiencing her last moments of ‘freedom’.<sup>93</sup>

However there are also other angles to explore in this imagery. In Ovid, another water-nymph tries to prevent Proserpina from being taken into the Underworld by Pluto (*Met.* 5.409-39). Cyane rises up from her pool to try to block their passage both verbally and physically (since Pluto had taken Proserpina by way of a chariot<sup>94</sup>), but Pluto hurls his spear into the pool and opens the way into the Underworld. This powerful scene viscerally depicts the rape of Cyane, with the spear fulfilling the role of phallus.<sup>95</sup> Pluto has here raped two characters in once scene, and an attempt to rescue Proserpina from sexual violation has resulted in the committing of another. No attempt will be made to rescue the Valerian Medea, herself compared to Proserpina, from her ‘raptor’ (or, in contrast to Apollonius, such an attempt comes too late);<sup>96</sup> instead, she will marry in the place where a nymph was raped, and which has become forever connected to the island where the wedding takes place.

There are still further connections. The island of Sicily, evoked here by Valerius, already has its own associations with the wedding of Jason and Medea.<sup>97</sup> Virgil’s Anchises is lost in Drepanum (now Trapani) on Sicily (*Aen.* 3.706-15), an area so-named because of its sickle shape.<sup>98</sup> Virgil in turn took influence from Drepane, the sickle-shaped island on which Apollonius’ Jason and Medea wed (AR

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<sup>93</sup> See Foley (1994, 98) on the myth being well known by poets, who would emphasise or suppress features of it in the knowledge that the audience would know variants.

<sup>94</sup> See above, on the *currus*.

<sup>95</sup> Segal (1994, 97) describes Cyane’s pool as standing for ‘all femininity; the spear is the raping phallus of masculine penetration’; Hinds (2002, 140) sees this scene as Ovid coming closest to describing the reality of rape.

<sup>96</sup> Absyrtus arrives only after Jason and Medea are married (8.259).

<sup>97</sup> The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* sets the location of the abduction in Asia Minor. See Hinds (1987) on the myth in Ovid’s *Met.*, in which the Sicilian variant is given, pointing out that the two Ovidian versions of the myth (it also appears in *Fasti* 4) are mutually dependent and to be read together.

<sup>98</sup> See Nappa (2004) on Sicily in the *Aeneid* and Callimachus’ *Aetia*.

4.983-1169).<sup>99</sup> Sicily also had a sickle place name, Zancle, and Ovid makes a note of the island's triangular shape as he begins his own narrative of Proserpina.<sup>100</sup> The island of Peuce is itself described as triangular by Apollonius, and Medea will go on to marry her *raptor* there in a cave described as *infausto*, a word with connections to the Underworld.<sup>101</sup> Proserpina lived in both the Underworld and on Earth; she was therefore both alive and dead, and straddled two worlds. Furthermore, in some respects Proserpina gained both new importance and a new kingdom as a result of her ordeal;<sup>102</sup> Medea's situation is similar to this scenario in some ways, but the differences are more significant. In terms of a new kingdom, Medea is also forced to leave her homeland, and takes residence in Colchis, but then must abandon it in the wake of her marriage breakdown, and surrounding events. In terms of new importance, in Jason's eyes this is short-lived, for he will soon attempt to usurp her as his wife with Glauke. She then becomes known as the killer of her own children, a vengeful Fury. Furthermore, there is a reminder of Triptolemus' flying plough here, the vehicle mobilised to celebrate Proserpina's return. Medea will not be returning to her family once this *raptor* has taken her away, and she utilises another flying machine to leave Jason once she has destroyed their family (Eur. *Med.* 1317-1419). Finally, this scene reminds us that Jason wishing to use Triptolemus' plough is ill-advised, and the celebratory overtones of that vehicle's original use will be overturned when he meets *this* Proserpina-like character.<sup>103</sup>

The comparisons to Diana and Proserpina are revealing, but the importance of the riverside setting itself for Jason and Medea's first meeting is not to be

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<sup>99</sup> See above for discussion of the shape of Drepane and Drepanum, and how this relates to Peuce.

<sup>100</sup> *trinacria* (*Met.* 5.347).

<sup>101</sup> *OLD infaustus* 2.

<sup>102</sup> Lefkowitz (1993, 33).

<sup>103</sup> See above.

ignored.<sup>104</sup> Again, the sexually charged nature of the landscape here brings into focus the transgressive nature of their own relationship; but the river itself will soon feature more prominently, and will retrospectively reveal itself to be a major clue as to the significance of the site of their own wedding.

The Phasis is described as *barbarus* by Helios as he tries to protest the Argonautic journey,<sup>105</sup> and we learn more about this river's savage nature as Jason is taken to Colchis. It seems that the Hister and the Phasis share a common history of sexual violation, and their victims are both nymphs. Upon their arrival at the Temple of the Sun, the Argonauts marvel at the pictures wrought in gold upon the doors. It is in the lengthy ecphrasis<sup>106</sup> to follow that we learn of the river Phasis' own murky mythological past. The pictures on the doors vividly depict the story of the nymph Aea and her abortive attempts to flee from Phasis):

*barbarus in patriis sectatur montibus Aean*

*Phasis amore furens: grauidas iacit illa pharetras*

*uirgineo turbata metu*<sup>107</sup> *discursibus et iam*

*deficit, ac uolucris uictam deus alligat unda.*<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Rivers are used in a number of ways in the *Argonautica*. For example, a description of Pelias' rivers quantifies his power (1.23-4). The Argonautic saga itself was arguably set in motion by Jason carrying Juno over the Enipeus. Jason alludes to this story (1.81-90), while making reference to being able to reach Phasis, not Colchis, in order to obtain the Fleece. Sol protests to Jupiter that he chose an inhospitable area for the Colchians to live to prevent such conquests as the Argonautic expedition, and says that the area is surrounded by frozen rivers (1.505-13); he goes on to evoke Phasis by name in his defence (1.517-8).

<sup>105</sup> *quid regio inmanis, quid barbarus amnibus ullis / Phasis et auersis proles mea gentibus obstat?* ('How can that savage land, how can wild Phasis oppose other rivers, or my offspring to hostile nations?' 1.517-8).

<sup>106</sup> Fowler (2000, 64-107), who offers an extensive bibliography (ibid., 65 n. 2). See Zissos (2002, 93) on the metapoetic nature of the ecphrasis of the *Argo* in 1.120-480.

<sup>107</sup> Wijsman (1996, 208) compares *uirgineo turbata metu* to *uirgineo cunctata metu* (5.392), a description of Medea as she hesitates in answering Jason on the occasion of their first meeting. cf. Sen. Med. 42: *pelle femineos metus!*

<sup>108</sup> This sounds not unlike the encircling embrace of *Ister* in Stat. *Silv.* 5.2.

(‘mad with love, wild Phasis pursues Aea on her native mountains, she shoots heavy arrows in womanly distress, and in fear she ceases to run around, and the god holds her defeated in his crashing wave’, 5.424-8).<sup>109</sup>

Here, we have another representation of a river ravishing a nymph, and intriguingly this story is not attested elsewhere.<sup>110</sup> Rather than give us an existing variant, Valerius innovatively introduces his own story of sexual violation and at a pivotal moment for Jason, as he arrives in the land in which he will marry. Again, Phasis is characterised as *barbarus*, and it has been suggested that this is perhaps an ethnographical reference to the people who live along its banks.<sup>111</sup> However the scene signifies more than that. The people of Colchis are not at any stage described as sexually rapacious; indeed, the foreigner Jason is the character associated with abduction, being described as a *raptor*.<sup>112</sup> The voraciousness and violence of the Phasis described at this stage must therefore refer to something else, and that something is Peuce. Furthermore, such ethnographical descriptions involve *ascribing* an identity to a race of people; the rivers Phasis and Hister are very definitely involved in *removing* the identity of both Aea and Peuce.<sup>113</sup>

Jason cannot know that the mythological story which he is viewing on the doors has such resonance on his own future wedding. This scene is undoubtedly different in tone to that on Peuce, with a word meaning ‘fear’ (*metus*) used. In this

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<sup>109</sup> Wijsman (1996, 207-8); Spaltenstein (2004, 498-9).

<sup>110</sup> See Wijsman (1996, 207) on aetiological myths of the Phasis, one of which involves the rape of the river’s daughter.

<sup>111</sup> Wijsman (1996, 207). Boyd (2006) sees Ovid’s rivers as narrative ‘stoppers’ in a labyrinthine text. See Jones (2005, 3) on Roman writers using rivers to define ritual and cosmology.

<sup>112</sup> However see above for discussion of the potentially confused ramifications of this title in this story.

<sup>113</sup> Jones (2005, 4) discusses the potential attractions of using water in cosmogonies; she suggest this is due to its changeable form. In Valerius, water does not change itself, but others.

story, the nymph Aea is clearly frightened of the river and tries to defend herself; the ecphrastic description of the doors gives the poet room to expand upon this disturbing scene. On the other hand, the interruption of Absyrtus' imminent arrival (8.259f) makes this sort of expansive description of Peuce and her plight impossible. Rather than being presented with a visual representation of Peuce's terror, as we are here with Aea, we are instead left to extrapolate what we can from the verb used describing the river Hister's actions (*presserat*, 8.256), and Peuce's physical state as exhausted. What is clear from this dramatic depiction of Phasis' story is that it shares a threatening and dark mythological history with Hister, and that this foreshadows what is to come for our protagonists.

Peuce's experience at the hands of the river Hister, and this scene's intricate relationship to Jason and Medea's wedding, gains in both significance and meaning when read with the occasion of Jason's first riverside meeting with Medea in mind. Her connections to Diana reveal an innate tension between the character, sexual violation, and images of the hunt all of which are prominent in her wedding scene. Medea's connections to Proserpina underpin these links to the act of rape, and the plight of Aea pictured on the doors to the temple of the Sun and viewed by Jason are proleptic in their resonance. Furthermore, the scenes of sexual violation which Ovid explore in his *Metamorphoses*, all of which feature landscape modification in some way, also come to bear on what Valerius includes in this troubling scene, since Diana, Proserpina, and the power of rivers are all prominent features in that work. By reading Peuce's ordeal in the light of these factors, it is possible to hypothesise that the nymph potentially did become the island on the occasion of her attack; however this cannot be conclusively proven. It is possible to demonstrate that the significance of Peuce's island is interrogated and tested even before we reach the island, and to

fully reveal this, a close retrospective reading of not only the text itself is required; stories from Ovid's poem of changes are also evoked repeatedly, and reading Peuce against this background reveals her/its true significance.

#### **2.4 Peuce: a suitable location for *this* wedding**

Given the multi-layered resonances involved in using Peuce as the site for Jason and Medea's wedding, it should not surprise us that Valerius chooses to do more with Peuce than Apollonius. Valerius' decision to stage the wedding on Peuce should not be considered a frivolous one, for he has carefully set up this location as significant at earlier important stages in the text, and its significance is revealed when considering it against the backdrop of earlier events in the poem. Jason and Medea's wedding is an outrage and a violation, but it is a major union. Valerius introduces Peuce firstly as an island, and later as a nymph, a striking course of action which immediately prompts investigation. Peuce is related in many ways to Drepane, the site of the wedding in Apollonius, but Drepane is both geographically inappropriate and simply too benign to fit Valerius' formula. At the very moment of the wedding, Valerius is very clear in describing the nymph's ordeal as a sexual violation. This turn of events forces us to question why a couple wishing to celebrate their union would choose (they were not forced) to do so in such an ill-starred location. Euphemistic language will not do at this moment: Peuce was raped, and somehow became conflated with the island. A major landscape violation is fitting at such a transformative moment,<sup>114</sup> and the island of Peuce presents an ideal opportunity to

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<sup>114</sup> Segal (1969, 39).



bring together the earlier references to boundary violations in the text, conflating them to provide the perfect wedding venue – if a disturbing one.

In investigating the potential outcome of Peuce's ordeal, and in attempting to discover how the island and nymph became confused, it becomes clear that the net must be widened to involve the reading of earlier events in the poem, and outside literature. Valerius' relationship with Ovid's victims of rape helps to elucidate Peuce's plight, and points us in the direction of understanding that what was once a nymph is now an island. However, perhaps the key to understanding Peuce's importance in this text is that no matter how we attempt to unpick her status, in many respects she remains elusive. Valerius presents her as an island and a nymph, and vaunts her disturbing mythical past. Statius goes on to refer to the island as possessing a spouse, a standpoint which neatly juxtaposes the opposing ideas of feature of the landscape having a spousal relationship. Peuce's metamorphosis, perhaps revealed by reading her plight against the backdrop of Ovidian rape narratives involving nymphs and various landscape features, demonstrates and underpins her liminal and changeable nature. That Peuce eludes specific categorisation in fact reinforces her transgressive status: boundaries are tested and then entirely collapsed, and events on Peuce represent a microcosm of the transgressive world which Valerius wishes to construct. Her very mysteriousness and resistance to be definitively described should be embraced, for it is these very features which hold the key to understanding why Valerius abandons Drepane, and re-sites the crucial union of Jason and Medea to this small island in the Danube delta.

### 3: Argonautic Monsters

In both Apollonius' and Valerius' versions of the Argonautic myth, Jason and Medea marry in a cave, though each cave is in a different location. Caves are evocative places,<sup>1</sup> and a particularly interesting function of them is as the home of monsters, transgressive creatures due to their hybridity.<sup>2</sup> In the course of the journey to Colchis, the Argonauts face the cave-dwelling Amycus (4.133-343), the Harpies (4.485-528), the fire-breathing bulls (7.547-606), the 'sown men' who spring from the dragon's teeth (7.607-643), and the dragon/serpent itself which guards the Golden Fleece (8.54-120) – all of which might be viewed as traditional monsters. We should therefore not be surprised by the appearance of the word *monstrum* throughout the text. However, the meaning of *monstrum* is not as clear-cut as might be expected, with the *OLD* defining it as follows: 1. an unnatural thing or event regarded as an omen, portent, prodigy, sign; 2. An awful or monstrous thing, event, etc; 3. A monstrous or horrible creature, monstrosity, monster; 4. A person of extreme wickedness, monster; 5. A monstrous act, horror, atrocity.<sup>3</sup> As such, not every instance of the word in the *Argonautica* is connected to the various encounters with 'real' monsters. Valerius therefore challenges us to think about what these examples refer to, what they mean in their individual context and how they make an impact on the text. Once again, boundaries of expectation are violated, and monsters are transgressive not only in their actual being, but even in the vocabulary used to

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<sup>1</sup> Calypso's cave is beautiful – and dangerous at *Od.* 5.55-74; nymphs are described as inhabiting caves, springs, groves and meadows (*Il.* 20.8-9 and *Od.* 6.123-4); see Cohen (2007) for more on landscapes in Greek art, plus bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> See *Od.* 9.112-5 for a description of the Cyclopes' cavernous homes. 'Even though they offered worship there, the ancient Greeks thought of caves as fantastic, transgressive, and implausible surroundings for ordinary human life [...] not only mysterious but at times uncivilised' (Cohen 2007, 314).

<sup>3</sup> See *TLL* viii. x.1446.4-1454.49, which immediately links the word with *monere*, and goes on to offer examples of other meanings, such as aberrations and abominations of nature, corrupt individuals, portents, and prodigies.

describe them. What becomes clear when we examine the role of monsters in the work, whether they are ‘real’ or figurative, is that we can use them as a tool to think about transgression and the issues surrounding transgressive behaviour.<sup>4</sup> It will also become clear that we can view Medea as being portrayed as a *monstrum*. In the final analysis, while Peuce’s cave is not *home* to a monster, it is certainly the case that a monster (or someone who would evolve into one) was in fact *marrying* in it.

The ultimate destination of the next three chapters of this study will once again be Jason and Medea’s wedding on Peuce. However during the course of the investigation into the pervasion of monsters into the text and how they help to highlight the issues surrounding transgression in the work, it will first be necessary to try to understand the nature of monsters themselves. As hybrids, they are unexpected blends of entities, and they blur the boundaries of species. As killers of humans, they go against the natural order, and usurp our role at the top of the food chain. An understanding of the ancient view of monsters is necessary to begin. We will then step back into earlier episodes of the poem, where the significance of monsters begins to be felt. The opening lines of the poem itself, where the poetic invocation to Apollo appears, might provide the first hints of monstrosity to come. Monsters are then shown to be the major drivers and motivators behind the Argonautic quest itself. Finally, the behaviour and character traits of Jason’s parents, and in particular his mother, are of importance, since monstrous attributes are also present there. Jason is therefore leaving monsters behind as he goes off to fight the monsters he meets in Colchis. Once these underlying issues have been thoroughly examined, the wider transgressive role that monsters play in the poem can begin to be explored.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Monstrous, immeasurable forces of nature are a threat to the cosmic rule, a challenge to established power’ (Rosati 2009, 271).

### 3.1 Defining the monster

There are a number of concerns to take into account when attempting to analyse the role that monsters play in a text. On the level of the plot, we must grapple with how monsters affect the outcome of the story and how this affects the other actors therein; for example, do any of the characters meet their end at the hands of a monster? If so, the actions, words, and back-story of this sort of nemesis are important. We must also determine the characterisation of the monster, by thinking about whether it self-classifies as such, the words used by other characters as they describe it, and the narrator's view.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, we should also think about what the extermination of a monster achieves for its killer, in terms of enhancing reputation either with his/her fictional peers, or by endowing him/her with heroic status and therefore rendering that character as an appropriate subject for Greek art.<sup>6</sup> The study of monsters, called teratology (from the Greek word *teras* meaning monster), brings these concerns to the fore.<sup>7</sup> Within this field, the problem of how to classify a monster persists, highlighting their potential liminality.<sup>8</sup> Recent studies into classical monsters, such as Morgan (1984), Buxton (1994), Atherton's 1998 edited volume, Cuny-Le Callet

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<sup>5</sup> See Laird (1997) for characterisation techniques.

<sup>6</sup> Neils (2007, 295) points out that in the Beazley database, there are '3,751 vase paintings of Heracles, compared to 786 of Theseus, 114 of Perseus, 27 of Bellerophon, and only 10 of Jason'. He adds that: 'Whereas Heracles has lots of claims to fame, Theseus, Perseus, and Bellerophon have only one in this period [the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE] – the conquest of a monster [the Minotaur, Medusa and the Chimera, respectively]' (ibid. 294-5). Clearly the extermination of such a creature may increase one's popularity as a subject for Greek art; however we can see that if the Beazley database of surviving artefacts is to be used to judge, that Jason's exploits do not grant him the same exalted status. See Silk (1985) on Heracles, monsters and tragedy.

<sup>7</sup> Dunstan Lowe advises *per litteras* that: 'the Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters' is forthcoming from Ashgate; *Preternature*, a journal launched in 2011, plans a special issue on 'Monstrosophy: The Academic Study of Monsters'; the annual Monsters and the Monstrous conference, organized by Interdisciplinary.net, has reached its tenth anniversary; and in April 2012, the University of Virginia hosted a graduate Classics conference subtitled 'Monsters and Monstrosity in Classical Antiquity'.

<sup>8</sup> J. J. Cohen (1996), Gilmore (2003), Scott (2007), and Asma (2009) deal with monster theory and teratology more broadly, whilst bringing in some aspects of ancient viewpoints. Wittkower (1942, 159-197), Lenfant (1999, 197), Evans (1999) and Felton (2012, 123) all consider the ethnography of monsters.

(2005), Murgatroyd (2007a), Felton (2012), and Lowe (forthcoming), all consider the difficulty of classifying monsters, and use the language of transgression in trying to do so.<sup>9</sup> The hybrid creature as a monster is also an area of interest, taking Hesiod's catalogue of monsters (*Theog.* 270-336) as a starting point.<sup>10</sup>

In language terms, the word *monstrum* is as difficult to define as the thing it describes. Perhaps the most obvious definition of *monstrum* to an English speaker is 'monster', but in Latin it can also mean 'prodigy' or 'portent', with some ancient scholars concentrating on the links between *monstra*, *prodigia*, *portenta*, *ostenta*, and *miracula*.<sup>11</sup> Definitions of the word include hybrids, a product of crime or transgression, or an outrageously immoral character;<sup>12</sup> the words *monstrum* and *teras* are also used to describe and classify disability in the ancient world.<sup>13</sup> Etymologically, the word *monstrum* was identified in antiquity as being related to the verbs *moneo*<sup>14</sup> and to *monstrare*,<sup>15</sup> and ancient scholars attempted to make clear-cut definitions of *monstra* using these verbs as a starting point. For example, Varro wrote: *prodigium, quod porro dirigit; miraculum, quod mirum est; monstrum, quod monet.* ('a prodigy, which lays out [matters] further off [in the future]; a miracle,

<sup>9</sup> For example, Lowe (forthcoming) argues that 'it is notoriously difficult to define the "monster" for ourselves, let alone impose it upon classical antiquity'.

<sup>10</sup> Woodard (2007, 83-105); Felton (2012, 104-5).

<sup>11</sup> Various modern scholars attempt to differentiate between them: see for example Moussy (1977, 349). See Cicero's *Pro Caelio* 12-14, where *monstrum*, *portentum* and *prodigium* are used as virtual synonyms. Luce (1963, 252) argues that *monstrum* is here 'used as a term of unmitigated abuse'. As Lowe (forthcoming) points out: 'Its range of meanings grew in several directions beyond the religious context, and it became the closest thing to a regular Latin word for physically anomalous beings. However, it never shed its ritual origins completely, retaining a sense of transgression and often threat in its transferred senses.' At the time of writing, the widely accessible article entitled '*monstrum*' on Wikipedia also makes reference to this etymology ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_ancient\\_Roman\\_religion#monstrum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_ancient_Roman_religion#monstrum), accessed 28 June 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Particularly for the Romans; see Felton (2012).

<sup>13</sup> See Garland (1995, 4), and Horstmanshoff (2012) and the various articles in the 2012 publication *Disability and Impairment in Antiquity; Behinderungen und Beeinträchtigungen* Vol. 2359.

<sup>14</sup> OLD: 1. To bring to the notice of, remind, tell (of); 2. To suggest a course of action, advise, recommend, warn, tell; 3. a. (of things, events) to serve as a reminder or warning to; b. (spec., of omens, signs, etc) to give warning of, presage. See also *TLL* viii. 1409.63ff.

<sup>15</sup> OLD: 1. to point out, to show; 2. to show by example, demonstrate, teach; 3. to expound, reveal, indicate, make known; 4. to give an indication of, reveal, betray, show; 5. to point out, mark out, designate; 6. (int.) to show the way, give directions (to).

which is extraordinary; a monster, which warns', *incertae sedis fragmenta* 440.4). Servius discusses the confusion between *prodigia*, *portenta* and *monstra* when commenting on *Aen.* 3.366, using Varro's description as authority. He also debates the *monstrum* at *Aen.* 2.680, when the harmless flames burn Ascanius' head, suggesting that a *monstrum* is more immediate in effect, whereas by contrast, a *prodigium* refers to something in the future.<sup>16</sup> A key text which indicates the multiplicity of interpretations of the word is Horace's *Carm.* 1.37, since at line 21, Horace calls Cleopatra a *fatale monstrum*.<sup>17</sup> Critics studying the text are divided on what this phrase actually means, and the numerous studies which have taken place use the language of transgression and indications of religious overtones.<sup>18</sup> Not only does this highlight that the word *monstrum* does not have a clear-cut definition, but the number of studies into this line of Horace's work indicate that the poet may have used the word precisely to prompt this sort of debate.<sup>19</sup>

Efforts to define *monstrum* continued into the second century. Sextus Pompeius Festus, in his *De Verborum Significatione*, gives perhaps the most detailed discussion of the word. In the first of three discussions (Lindsay 1967, 125.5-6), he explicitly connects *monstrum* with *monere* in that such a thing may provide a warning (*quod moneat aliquid futurum*). He then contrasts *monstra* with *prodigia* (something which foretells an action); *portenta* (which presage events), and *ostenta* (which are connected with ideas of 'showing'). In the second discussion (Lindsay

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<sup>16</sup> See also *Aen.* 2.245, where the Trojan horse is called *monstrum infelix*.

<sup>17</sup> Nisbet and Hubbard (1970, 406-11, and ad loc.) say that 'a *monstrum* is a thing which *monet* (cf. *claustrum*, *lustrum* etc), i.e. a portent or something outside the norm of nature'. They point out that *monstrum* was a word common to Latin invective, directing us to Cic. *Pis.* fr. 1 *ut hoc portentum huius loci, monstrum urbis, prodigium ciuitatis viderem*, and Flor. *Epit.* 2. 21. 3 *monstrum illud* (of Cleopatra). See also the brief comments of West (2007, 186-7).

<sup>18</sup> See Grunmel (1954, 360); Luce (1963); Galinsky (1966, 47-50); Mench (1972); DeForest (1989). This interpretation of *monstrum* as a warning can be directly compared to *Argonautica* 1.5, where Valerius' use of *mone*, the word potentially meaning 'warn', could be interpreted as being linked to *monstra*.

<sup>19</sup> There are three occasions in Valerius' poem where *monstra* seems to mean 'prodigy' or 'portent' rather than 'monster': for example 4.187-9, 5.259-61 and 6.6-7; all of these will be discussed below.

1967, 122.7-8f), Festus compares *monstrum* and the verb *monstrare*. He begins by citing Aelius Stilo, who connected *monstrum* with the verb *monere*, but makes reference to Sennius Capito, who connects *monstrum* with *monere* with the added connection to *monstrare*, in that a monster may ‘indicate’ a warning. Here a further link to *ostenta* is made. In his third discussion of the word (Lindsay 1967, 146.32-3), he speaks of creatures *naturae modum egredientia* ‘outside the rules of nature’, here bringing in the more ‘usual’ definition of monsters. Festus’ final note on *monstra* occurs during a discussion of *portenta* (Lindsay 1967, 284.4-7), with Festus arguing that *monstra*, <quae> *praecipiant quoque remedia*. (‘*monstra* anticipate those things which are also remedies’). Here we see a positive side to the interpretation of *monstra*.

The multiplicity of definitions presents an intriguing challenge when it comes to attempting to interpret what the word *monstrum* means in its individual context. Valerius’ repeated use of the word throughout his text challenges us to think carefully about just *what* or *who* the Argonauts are facing at any given time. Sometimes it is clear that *monstrum* pertains to a ‘monster’, a creature which may have *some* tenuous link to humanity but which is largely outside it, or which is a beastly creature. At other times, a clear cut interpretation is decidedly more difficult to achieve, resulting in ambiguity of interpretation. A similar confusion afflicts some of the characters in the poem: for example, Pelias is unsure of the monsters defeated by Hercules, a moment which reveals a gap in his knowledge of monsters; Jason, too, is shown to be unclear about the dangers of monsters, or indeed the nature of what he has faced along the way. The choice of definitions of the word also results in a situation where it is used precisely *because* it has so many meanings, and thus indicates that the thing which is classified as a *monstrum* is unclear in its status.

Thus Valerius' repeated use of *monstra* complements and helps to construct his boundary-free world.

Importantly, the *Argo* itself is classified as a *monstrum* in Roman literature.<sup>20</sup> Catullus' mini-epic poem 64 purports to be an epithalamium for Peleus and Thetis; however the immediate focus of the work is the *Argo* as the first ship.<sup>21</sup> Catullus specifically classifies the *Argo* as a *monstrum*, since the ship's appearance is something of a shock to those dwelling at sea: *emersere freti candenti e gurgite uultus / aequoreae monstrum Nereides admirantes* ('the watery Nereids raised their faces from the glistening whirlpool of the sea wondering at the monster', Cat. 64.14-5).<sup>22</sup> Of note is also Catullus' use of the verb *proscindo*, meaning 'to cut',<sup>23</sup> in connection with the *Argo*: *proscidit aequor* ('[the *Argo*] 'cuts the sea'', Cat. 64.12). Ovid saw the importance of this idea, and used it in his own telling of the Argonautic myth: *Iamque fretum Minyae Pagasaea puppe secabant*, (and now the Pagasaeon Argonauts were cutting through the straits in their ship, *Met.* 7.1). The verb *secare* can mean, amongst other definitions, 'to cut',<sup>24</sup> an idea which clearly resonated with both of these poets. Valerius arguably picks up these references at the beginning of book 2. Juno wants Jason to remain in ignorance to prevent him turning back to Iolchos and thus potentially ending the quest.<sup>25</sup> The language used to describe Jason's progress is evocative (2.1-2): *Interea scelerum luctusque ignarus Iason / alta*

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<sup>20</sup> See Hardie (1997) and Harrison (1995) for more on Virgil and his interest in the ship as a man-made *monstrum*.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter 6.1 for more on the first sea journey.

<sup>22</sup> Feeney (2007, 123) points out that the Nereids should in fact be the monstrosity, as they are creatures which live in the sea; see O'Hara (2007, 33-54) for a discussion of the inconsistency in the 'first ship' myth in Catullus 64. For more on this poem see Chapter 6.

<sup>23</sup> OLD s. v., *proscindo*.

<sup>24</sup> OLD s. v., *seco*. See Feeney (2007, 123-7). Note that the words *secat* and *monstra* appear together at Statius, *Theb.* 5.570-1: *uolat hasta tremens et hiantia monstra / ora subit linguaeque secat fera uincla trisulcae*, ('The quivering spear flies, and enters the monster's gaping mouth and slashes the rough fastenings of the triple tongue'). On Capaneus as gigantomachic monster, see Lovatt (2005, 131-6) and Stover (2009b, 440-5 and 2012). For the connections between Statius' Argonautic narrative and Valerius, see Stover (2009b). For more on Hypsipyle in Valerius, see Clare (2004), Gibson (2004), Hershkowitz (1998b, *passim*), and the discussion below.

<sup>25</sup> See Monaghan (2005).



*secat*; ('meanwhile, ignorant of the crimes and the mourning, Jason cleaves the deep').<sup>26</sup> Thus Valerius' use of *secat* here in describing the ship as it travels is perhaps reminiscent not only of earlier references to the way the *Argo* begins sea travel for humans, but also to the 'monstrous' nature of the first vessel, with the monstrous quality lying explicitly in the paradox of 'cutting the sea'.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.2 Monstrous beginnings in the *Argonautica*

That the *Argo* itself is monstrous and carries out the monstrous action of 'cutting' reminds us of its own transgressive status. We have seen above the links made by the ancients between *monstra* and the verb *moneo*, and their extensive efforts to relate the words in an attempt to make sense of precisely what else a *monstrum* can signify. As the *Argonautica* begins, we find that Valerius also speaks of a warning, and as such, a link to the monstrous can potentially be discerned. In a passage which has been described as 'the most widely discussed of the poem',<sup>28</sup> Valerius opens his work with the invocation (Arg. 1.5): *Phoebe, mone*.<sup>29</sup> This phrase, consisting of a vocative noun and imperative verb, is a powerful one, with etymological links to *monstra* therein. When reading this invocation retrospectively, and against the background of monsters which pervade the text, we see that monsters therefore may be playing an important and surprising role in the proem of the *Argonautica*,

<sup>26</sup> Poortvliet (1991, *ad loc.*) identifies this line with *Aen.* 5.1. *interea... secabat*.

<sup>27</sup> See also 4.601 *proxima Thermodon hinc iam secat ara fluento*, where Murgatroyd (2009, 601) argues that the 'cut' sense of the verb is 'aptly used of the river of the warlike Amazons who wielded axes and spears'. Phineas advises that the Argonauts do not view them as warriors, but as monsters (4.602-5).

<sup>28</sup> See Zissos (2008, 79) and Kleywegt (2005, 11) for detailed bibliography.

<sup>29</sup> See Nauta (2006, 21-9) on the links between this and *Cynthus... admonuit* in *Ecl.* 6.3-4.

underpinning the action as a whole and forcing us from the outset to think about the impact of these transgressive beings.

The proem, wherever it appears in a text,<sup>30</sup> usually contains some sort of an invocation to some kind of inspiring deity; sometimes the Muse, sometimes a specific god.<sup>31</sup> In making this sort of plea, the poet implies that he needs divine assistance to tell his story, or that the story itself comes from the deity and he is simply the conduit through whom that tale might be told. We will discuss the impact of both words, looking carefully at the obvious etymological link between the verb *moneo* (to warn, advise) and the noun *monstrum* (portent or monster).<sup>32</sup> It will also be necessary to analyse how the invocation to Phoebus specifically plays a role in the construction of monsters. What becomes clear is that Valerius has used a word etymologically connected with *monstra* in his invocation *Phoebe mone* (1.5), and in a passage which is recognised as important at the very beginning of his poem; furthermore we shall begin to see the importance of the omission of the Muses in the proem, and the importance of Apollo as their substitute for inspiration.

In the invocation of 1.5, the vocative noun used is *Phoebe*, which most commonly refers to Apollo. Some have speculated that this sentence shows that Valerius may have been a member of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*, perhaps implying a special relationship between Valerius and the god.<sup>33</sup> Given Apollo's connection with poetry, a request for assistance such as the one made by Valerius in 1.5 is of course not unusual; indeed a *PHI* search shows that the vocative *Phoebe*

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<sup>30</sup> For more on middles, see Kyriakidis' and De Martino's 2004 edited volume.

<sup>31</sup> See also, for example, *Georgics* 3.1-15: Virgil says he will sing *pastor ab Amphryso*, ('the famed shepherd of Amphrysus', *G.* 3.2), understood to be Apollo (see Thomas (1988), and Mynors (1994, ad loc.)). See also the 'second proem', to be found in Apollonius' *Arg.* 3.1-5, Virgil's *Aen.* 7.37f, and Valerius Flaccus 5.217-24 – more on the latter below.

<sup>32</sup> Maltby (1991, 391-2) also gives references to two etymologies of the word: one from *monere* and the other from *monstrare*. Modern critics, in their study of monsters generally or monsters in the classical world itself, also regularly make the connections between *moneo* and *monstrum*: see for example Cohen (1996, 4), Lenfant (1999, 198), Murgatroyd (2007a, 1), and Felton (2012).

<sup>33</sup> See Kleywegt (2005 *ad loc.*) and Zissos (2008 *ad loc.* and xiv).

appears no fewer than 142 times in 108 authors. However, the combination of cognates of *Phoebus* and the verb *moneo* appearing in close proximity like this only occurs in Seneca's *Agamemnon* (321 and 323) and Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* 1.25-30. The latter example is the most intriguing for our purposes, since here Ovid rejects the assistance of Apollo (*Phoebe*), heavenly birds (*aëriae auis*), and the Muse Clio and her sisters (*Clio Cliusque sorores*) as he composes his didactic treatise on love.<sup>34</sup> The verb *mone* as used here also generated some debate over its use, with some arguing that means 'inspire [me]', whilst others go for the sacral 'guide me'.<sup>35</sup> Valerius could therefore be calling upon Apollo in the god's guise as protector of poets to provide inspiration to him, as a poet closely connected with that god through his (potential) priesthood.

However the nuances of Valerius' choice of *Phoebe* bears further probing. Poetic invocations to Phoebus are not at all uncommon, but specific circumstances pertaining to the divine in the Argonautic myth require further consideration. Phoebus (i.e. 'bright') Apollo came to be connected with the Greek Sun-deity Helios and the Roman sun-god Sol, and the Sun is an entity with a significant role to play in Medea's story.<sup>36</sup> Even though the invocation to Phoebus is made only five lines into the first book, we are able to make links to the sun itself in the line before, where sun

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<sup>34</sup> Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* 1.25-30: *Non ego, **Phoebe**, datas a te mihi mentiar artes, / Nec nos aëriae voce monemur avis, / Nec mihi sunt visae Clio Cliusque sorores / Servanti pecudes vallibus, Ascra, tuis: / Usus opus movet hoc: vati parete perito; / Vera canam: coeptis, mater Amoris, ades!* ('I shall not pretend the skills were given to me by you, Apollo, nor that we are being advised [inspired?] by the voice of heavenly birds, nor that I saw Clio and her sisters herding flocks in your valleys, Ascra: Experience drives this work: pay attention to the experienced poet; I will sing true. Mother of Love, assist these beginnings!'). See Hollis (1977, 36-7) and Murgatroyd (1982, 54-5). This rejection of divine inspiration will become relevant further into this discussion, but it is important to raise the theme now.

<sup>35</sup> Kleywegt (2005, 12): 'For *mone* used as 'to inspire' (also 6.34, *Musa, mone*); cf. V. A. 7.41 *tu uatem, tu diua mone*, Ov. *Fast.* 3.261 *nympha, mone* and 5.447 *Pliade nate, mone*', Zissos (2006, 80): and hints at the poet-as-conduit in a divine-mortal collaboration. See Price (1991, 287 plus bibliography) for the hymnic opening of Apollonius' *Argonautica*.

<sup>36</sup> See Zissos (2008, 79) on Sol.

imagery is already implied by the adjective *flammifero*<sup>37</sup> at 1.4, which is used to qualify Olympus, the ultimate destination of the *Argo*.<sup>38</sup> We should not expect the word ‘Apollo’ to denote the sun-god in Latin;<sup>39</sup> however the word ‘Phoebus’ certainly can, and this connection becomes all the more enticing when we note that one of the main characters in the epic, Medea, is descended from the Sun.<sup>40</sup> The god referred to might therefore be seen as closely connected with the plot itself.

If we think about the invocation as being made to Phoebus the *composite* god, the conflated Sun deity, further interpretative possibilities arise. Looking back at the various definitions of *moneo* above, perhaps in *Phoebe*, *mone* at 1.5 Valerius is asking the Sun God to *remind* us/him of the story of Medea.<sup>41</sup> If anyone should know this story, and in full, then surely it is Medea’s grandfather and Sun-god Helios, who in Euripides’ *Medea* provides his granddaughter with the technology to make her

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<sup>37</sup> The *OLD* entry gives us ‘carrying or having flames, fiery, flaming’; see also *TLL* vi(1).872.64–873.5, where it is suggested that the adjective *flammiifer*, a compound word comprised of *flamma* and *ferre*, saw its first use in Ennius but afterward was used most frequently by Valerius and Silius Italicus (though it is also attested in other sources). It is used in connection with the Sun but also with other celestial phenomena; see for example: Ov. *Met.* 2.155 (on Phaethon and his father’s chariot): *Interea volucres Pyrois et Eous et Aethon, / Solis equi, quartusque Phlegon hinnitibus auras / flammiferis inplent pedibusque repagula pulsant.* (‘Meanwhile the sun’s swift horses, Pyrois, Eoüs, Aethon, and the fourth, Phlegon, fill the air with fiery whinnying, and strike the bars with their hooves’); *Met.* 15.848–501: *luna volat altius illa / flammiferumque trahens spatioso limite crinem / stella micat* (‘it [Caesar’s spirit] climbed higher than the moon, and dragging behind it a fiery tail in a large track, shone as a star.’); Sil. *Pun.* 5.55–6: *donec flammiferum tollentes aequore currum / solis equi sparsere diem* (‘while the Sun’s horses lifted his fiery chariot from the sea and scattered the daylight’). *Flammiifer* is used on three further occasions in Valerius’ *Argonautica*, at 6.434, 7.185 and 7.233, each time to describe the fiery bulls that Jason faces in Colchis.

<sup>38</sup> See Barchiesi (2009, 163–7) on the constellations as monsters; *flammifero Olympo* (1.4) may be another name for the heavens, and the *Argo*’s destination as a constellation. Note that during the Amycus episode, Orion is figured as a rapist and a constellation (4.121–5; see Murgatroyd (2009, 88–9)).

<sup>39</sup> Håkanson (1969, 138–9).

<sup>40</sup> The characters themselves conflate Helios and Sol. In his explanation of the mission to Jason, Pelias begins to briefly describe the history of Phrixus and the Fleece, interrupting it with an exclamation: ‘*heu magni Solis pudor!*’ (‘Oh, the shame of the great Sol!’); indeed Sol himself makes an appearance in book 1 of the epic at 1.503–27, introduced by these words: *sed non et Scythici genitor discrimine nati / intrepidus tales fundit Sol pectore voces* (‘But not undaunted [by the plight?] of his Scythian child, Father Sol pours out words such as these from his breast’), before voicing his concerns to Jupiter over the Argonautic mission.

<sup>41</sup> Hesiod (*Theog.* 53–67) describes the Muses’ birthplace and character: their mother was Mnemosyne (meaning ‘memory’). At *Theog.* 94 we learn that Apollo is their ‘chaperone and leader’ (Spentzou 2002, 2). Memory was also an important theme connected to *moneo*: on *mone* in Arg. 1.5, Zissos (2008, 80) compares *Aen.* 1.8 *memora*, which ‘carries an implication of instruction rather than dictation’.

escape once she has murdered her children.<sup>42</sup> Not only that, but Helios is something of an ‘all-seeing eye’: he discovers the affair between Ares and Aphrodite and reports back to the wronged husband, Hephaistos.<sup>43</sup> As we shall see, eyes and vision play an important role in monstrous behaviour. Thus it is tempting to read the invocation to Phoebus at this early stage of the work in more than one way: to Apollo, the patron of poetry and focus of the priesthood to which the poet may have belonged; or to the Sun, the deity with more than a passing interest in the outcome of the mission and welfare of his grandchild, a figure who is variously represented as Apollo, Greek Helios and Roman Sol, the latter playing a part in the *Argonautica* itself on more than one occasion. Boundaries are once again being questioned here. If Valerius is indeed calling upon a ‘source’ who knows the story better than he does, then the ‘reminder’ (following his invocation with *mone*) he receives is something quite different from what the audience may already recognise as a version of the myth. As we have seen, the way in which Valerius chooses to represent his version of the plot differs from those which have gone before. Either the ‘reminder’ given is not an accurate one, or the differences presented by Valerius call to mind other earlier versions by way of a curious inversion: elements of the story are conspicuous by their absence, and so *not* putting them in highlights the contrast with earlier versions.<sup>44</sup> As we constantly compare this text with earlier versions, we are being reminded at all times of the differences which exist. Those familiar with the Argonautic saga as told elsewhere are confronted with so much ‘new’ detail here that

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<sup>42</sup> Eur. *Medea*, 1315f. We shall return to Helios’ far-reaching vision and its potential significance later.

<sup>43</sup> *Od.* 8.295-369; *Ars* 2.573ff. See Wijsman (2000, 187; *ad* 5.468) for references to Venus’ continued hostility toward the Sun and his progeny. See *Arg.* 2.84-106 for a reminder of this tale. On Ares and Aphrodite, see Braswell (1982); Olson (1989); Alden (1997).

<sup>44</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, chapter 4) on ‘the road not taken’, and Zissos (1999b) on the Valerian density of ‘negative allusion’.

they perhaps cannot help be reminded that Valerius is presenting us with something quite different.

The absence of an invocation to the Muses at the outset of the work is also striking; that does not come until 6.34, when divine assistance is needed to bring Medea into the poem. The absence of the Muses' involvement here does not sound particularly irregular, but cognates of *moneo* and *Phoebe* appear together infrequently.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, looking back at the suggested definitions of *mone* to be found in the *OLD*, a *further* attractive interpretative possibility concerning Valerius' invocation to Phoebus begins to take shape: the poet could in fact be asking the god (whichever 'Phoebus' it is he is calling upon) to *warn* him about the dire elements of the story to come. Through this device, we as the audience are also being warned, and there are certainly many things to be wary of in this saga: the end of an age of innocence heralded by the first ship, civil war, mistaken slaughter of friends, love and loss, and of course, terrifying encounters with monsters. It is this final feature of the story which may be evoked when reading the imperative *mone*, given the obvious etymological link between the verb *moneo* and the noun *monstrum*, meaning portent or monster – the connections between the two having been discussed above.

Just as *mone* at 1.5 can be read as both an invocation to Apollo the bright deity of poetry, and/or the conflated Sun-god and grandfather of Medea, the all-seeing eye who has doubts about the Argonautic expedition and worries for his offspring, it might just as easily be read as a warning, asked to be meted out by that

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<sup>45</sup> See note 36. The words *Musa* and *Phoebe* also appear together infrequently, and once again, on both occasions appear when poetic inspiration is being rejected: see Statius, *Silvae* 1.5.1-5: *Non Helicon graui pulsat chelys enthea plectro, | nec lassata uoco totiens mihi numina, **Musas**; | et te, **Phoebe**, choris et te dimittimus, Euhæ; | tu quoque muta ferae, uolucer Tegeæ, sonora | terga premas: alios poscunt mea carmina coetus*. ('The inspired lyre does not resound with grave plectrum at Helicon; nor do I call on the Muses, who so often exhausted their spirit for me. And you, Phoebus and Bacchus, we dismiss you from our songs; and you too, winged Tegean, keep mute the melodious tortoise shell! My songs demand other beginnings') and Martial 2.22.1-2: *Quid mihi uobiscum est, o Phoebe nouemque sorores? | Ecce nocet uati Musa iocosa suo*. ('What do I want with you, O Phoebus, and the nine sisters? See the laughing Muse injures her own bard!').

deity. Furthermore perhaps this initial invocation using the ambiguous imperative verb *mone* can be read as a link to the fearful creatures which the characters, the poet and the audience will all encounter as they navigate the work, dealing with the changes Valerius has introduced, and reading them against a backdrop of earlier Argonautic work. As we shall see, the absence of the Muses at this point will become significant later into this discussion of the monstrous and will be a driver for considering transgression as a wider theme. What is striking is that notwithstanding the hint of monsters in the word *mone* in 1.5, monsters are very quickly in the foreground as the motive behind Pelias' decision to send Jason abroad in the first place. Monsters, with all of the transgressive elements they embody, will therefore prove to be a major driving force behind the whole quest.

### **3.3 Monsters as motivation for the mission**

Following the etymologically-intriguing invocation to Phoebus in 1.5 (*Phoebe, mone*), we find that as the story begins to unfold references to monsters become more specific, leading to them playing a surprising and driving role therein. Creatures which are difficult to classify, of which we should be wary, and of which we have already been warned, will be met during the course of the quest, but the role of monsters as motivator and cause of sending the Argonauts abroad cannot be overlooked. They are in the foreground as Valerius finishes his proem and launches into the narrative, firmly underpinning the transgressive nature of the first sea journey.

It has been noted that Jason does not feature in the opening of the text in any way.<sup>46</sup> When he is finally introduced, even then we do not get his name, only his description and a brief biography,<sup>47</sup> which is focalised through the eyes of his uncle Pelias (1.26-8): *sed non ulla quies animo fratrisque pauenti / progeniem diuumque minas; hunc nam fore regi / exitio uatesque canunt pecudumque per aras / terrifici monitus*<sup>48</sup> *iterant* ('but there was never rest for his mind through fear of his brother's son and the gods' threats; for terrified soothsayers foretold that he would destroy the king and the warnings of cattle were repeated at the altars').<sup>49</sup> For now, Jason is just the *iuuenis Aesonium* (1.31-2) and the king decides he must be sent away to meet his death. We immediately gain an insight into where he decides to send him, and, importantly, why:

*sed neque bella*<sup>50</sup> *uidet Graias neque monstra per urbes*  
  
*ulla: Cleonaeo iam tempora clusus hiatu*  
  
*Alcides; olim Lerneae defensus ab angue*

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<sup>46</sup> M. Davis (1990, 46).

<sup>47</sup> See Adamietz (1976, 5-6); Hershkowitz (1998b, 106); Kleywegt (2005, *ad loc.*); Zissos (2008, *ad loc.*).

<sup>48</sup> Notice that here, warnings are being issued.

<sup>49</sup> Zissos (2008, *ad loc.*) notes that there are similarities here to *Aen.* 4.464-5. Note that there is no reference to 'the man with one sandal', as seen in *AR* 1.5-17 and Pindar *Pyth.* 4.73-8 (see Zissos (2006a) for Valerius' influence on the *Orphic Argonautica*, where a similar chain of events to that given in Valerius is told). In these earlier texts, Jason makes his first appearance by helping Hera, disguised as an old woman, across the river Enipeus. As he does so, he loses his sandal in the water and arrives in the city to fulfil the prophecy. Jason himself mentions this story at 1.81-90 without mentioning the river by name (see Zissos (1999b) on 'negative allusion'). This river holds its own fascination: in Propertius, where Neptune rapes Tyro whilst disguised as the Enipeus: *non sic Haemonio Salmonida mixtus Enipeo / Taenarius facili pressit amore deus* ('not so easily did the Taenarian god disguised as Haemonian Enipeus attack with love Salmoneus' girl', Prop. 1.13.22-3). As such, Pelias is therefore himself a product of rape (Kleywegt 2005, 1.26-30 n.). Pelias may therefore himself be classed as some kind of monster, if we take the view of Buxton (1994, 206): 'Monsters are nearly always the product of a liaison which is itself abnormal'.

<sup>50</sup> See Strand (1972, 39-40) and Kleywegt (2005, *ad loc.*) on *bella*. Zissos (2008, *ad loc.*) refers us to 4.752; Sen. *Her. F.* 212, 527, 997; Stat. *Theb.* 6.311 and to additional examples in *TLL* ii. 1824. 69ff. and v/1. 2181. 20ff on *duellum*. The idea of having to send Jason away to fight contrasts with the situation at the opening of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* (*BC* 1.8-23), where the Romans are characterised as all too keen to fight a civil war at home, when in fact the eradication of foreign enemies should be at the forefront of their minds.



*Arcas et ambobus iam cornua fracta iuuencis.*

*ira maris uastique placent discrimina ponti.*

(‘But nowhere throughout the cities of Greece were there to be seen any wars or monsters: Alcides has long since covered his temples with the Cleonaeon jaws; long ago was the Arcadian protected from Lerna’s serpent and the horns of the two bulls broken. He decides upon the anger of the sea and the dangers of the vast ocean’, 1.33-7)

Here we learn the surprising fact that the major problem facing Pelias is the conspicuous lack of *monstra* in Greece which might usefully be made into Jason’s enemies (1.33-4): *sed neque bella uidet Graias neque monstra per urbes / ulla*. During his ruminations Pelias refers to places such as Cleonae (near Nemea) and Lerna (in the Argolis), which has led some to suggest that Pelias believes he will have to send Jason very far away to meet his doom.<sup>51</sup> Certainly Pelias is of the belief that there are no monsters for Jason to face in a nearby location, and that there is no choice but to send him across the sea.<sup>52</sup> Here monsters are the specific motivating factor for the very existence of the Argonautic quest; indeed before we even hear of the Fleece, which comes at 1.56-7, the quest is cast in terms of the absence of monstrous creatures, rather than in terms of the capture of the traditional booty.

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<sup>51</sup> Kleywegt (2005, *ad loc.*); see Zissos (2008, *ad loc.*) on monster-slaying as the ‘tyrant’s preferred method for eliminating rivals.’

<sup>52</sup> Kleywegt (2005, *ad loc.*) points out that *ulla* forcefully denotes this complete lack of monsters (and the fact that this probably also indicates that Hercules had probably completed his labours by now); Zissos (2008, *ad loc.*) argues that Pelias ‘unwittingly furthers Jupiter’s global purpose’. For this purpose, see 1.498-502.

As Pelias considers the lack of monsters available in Greece, he begins to list those monsters which Hercules has already dispatched.<sup>53</sup> Here, an issue arises which shows that Pelias' knowledge of monsters is in fact flawed, and that therefore he does not understand them. The 'two bulls' formula in 1.36 has been called a 'mythological puzzle',<sup>54</sup> and has prompted a great deal of debate. While the Nemean lion and Lernaean hydra clearly relate to Hercules, oddly the defeat of only *one* bull (the Cretan bull) belongs to the usual tradition of creatures faced down by the hero, and so the inclusion of *two* is unusual. It has been argued that the reference is to the Cretan and Marathonian bulls,<sup>55</sup> or perhaps the river Achelous transformed into a bull (*Met.* 9.1-88).<sup>56</sup> Others have argued that this collection of now-absent monsters is a reference not only to the labours Jason will face in Colchis (7.553-606), but also to the serpent which guards the Fleece (8.54-94), and to the fact that Jason is seeking a garment which he might also wear (8.121-6),<sup>57</sup> just as Hercules had done with the Nemean lion. A parallel between Pelias and Aeetes has also been drawn, in that Pelias would, if he were able, use fire-breathing bulls to try and defeat Jason in the same way that Aeetes will do.<sup>58</sup> If this 'puzzle' was 'an end in itself'<sup>59</sup>, it contributes to Pelias' confusion over the status of monsters. Certainly, what is clear is that the monsters absent from Greece are now a problem for the king, despite his apparent

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<sup>53</sup> Taylor (1994, 230-1) argues that by explicitly referring to the creatures defeated by Hercules, his actions might be seen to be on par with Jason's achievements. The hero will of course himself end up joining the Argonautic mission for a short time; see below for discussion of the Sigeum episode.

<sup>54</sup> Zissos (2008, *ad loc.*).

<sup>55</sup> Hollis (1990, 218).

<sup>56</sup> Taylor (1994, 231).

<sup>57</sup> Gärtner (1994, 66-7); see also Hershkowitz (1998b, 118-9). Feeney (1991, 333) discusses the cloak of Salmoneus which Jason wears as he sets off. 'He was a *contemptor divum*, and thus a transgressor, though 1.660-5 indicates that his attempt to usurp Jupiter had not yet occurred. There is a parallel here between the threat the gods feel to the mission and Jason's donning of such a problematic cloak'.

<sup>58</sup> Taylor (1994, 231). Zissos (2008, *ad loc.*) collects two arguments against this being a reference to Achelous, the first being that of the commentator Heinsius, who points out that there is a chronological inconsistency; Zissos reminds us that Valerius rarely troubles himself with mythological chronology. The second is that of the editor Dureau de Lamalle, who protests that Achelous was a private rival of Hercules' and as such, the analogy here does not fit.

<sup>59</sup> Zissos (2008, *ad loc.*).

confusion as to the creatures that *might* have at one time been available to him had Hercules not intervened. Monsters being conspicuous by their absence, and the framing of the Argonautic mission in these terms rather than in terms of seeking the Fleece, are intriguing points in the text. We know that Jason and his men will soon meet a monster at Sigeum, but Hercules will see it off, not the protagonist. There is no hint that this monster could have been used for Pelias' murderous ends, even if he had been aware of its existence. In fact, despite the Argonauts facing the monster at Sigeum, Amycus, and the Harpies on their journey, the only monsters Jason himself meets are the earth-born men, fire-breathing bulls and the serpent which guards the Fleece – and all are defeated with Medea's assistance.

Ironically, by sending Jason away to face the perils of the sea, Pelias is fulfilling the very prophecy he is trying to avoid. Traditionally, however, the king does not die at his nephew's hands, but at the hands of Jason's new bride, Medea.<sup>60</sup> Pelias is therefore encouraging Jason to go abroad, only for Jason to bring back with him the instrument of the king's demise.<sup>61</sup> In his curious list of absent monsters, Pelias demonstrates that he does not understand them, and this flawed knowledge ultimately leads to the Argonauts facing a number of real monsters, and to Jason meeting and marrying a female monster, who will return to kill Pelias.

Perhaps a further allusion to Medea can be seen in the mention of the Nemean lion, a hide proudly worn by Hercules. Medea will produce her own garment in future, just as she begins her plans to remove Jason's paramour,

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<sup>60</sup> See Eur. *Med.* e.g. 9-10. Zissos (2008, 1.31-2, 81-6 and 807-14nn). Pelias' death is anticipated at 1.807-14, 1.847-8 and 2.1-5. See Gantz (1993, 366-7) on the story of Medea convincing Pelias' daughters that she can rejuvenate the dead by performing the trick on a ram, and subsequently refusing to repeat it on their father (whom they have chopped up). Euripides presented a play, now lost, entitled *Peliades* in 455BC. See Zissos (2008, 406-7) for more on this.

<sup>61</sup> Note that in some versions, Medea rejuvenates Jason's father Aeson (see for example *Met.* 7.251-93); this does not occur here as Aeson commits suicide at 1.819-29, though for Zissos (2008, 807-14n.) Valerius includes a 'negative allusion' to Aeson's rejuvenation at 6.444-5: *recoquit fessos aetate parentes / datque alias sine lege colus*. For more on negative allusion, see Zissos (1999b).

Glauke/Kreousa.<sup>62</sup> This dangerous garment is also alluded to just as Jason and Medea marry, at a moment which crystallises Jason and Medea's transgressive union: *ipsa*<sup>63</sup> *suas illi croceo subtegmine vestes / induit, ipsa suam duplicem Cytherea coronam / donat et arsuras alia cum virgine gemmas.* ('Venus dresses her, giving [Medea] her own two-fold headdress and the jewels which will burn along with another bride', 8.234-6).<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, on seeing the corpses of his children, Jason connects Medea to a lion and the monster Scylla (Eur. *Med.* 1339-43), and Medea reinforces this idea herself shortly afterward (ibid., 1358-60).<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps it can be said therefore that while Jason has no monsters to face in Greece due to the heroics of Hercules, he will face them abroad, be they in the form of fire-breathing bulls, earth-born men, or serpents perhaps alluded to in 1.33-7. These are not the only monsters he will face, however: a diabolical woman, Medea, will help him defeat all of these, in his quest for the garment which perhaps can be compared to the hide of the Nemean lion mentioned in 1.36; furthermore, this woman will eventually produce a terrible garment of her own, and will be brought back across the sea to destroy the very man who has set these wheels in motion in the first place. As Euripides shows, Jason himself will one day recognise Medea as a monster, as she kills their children in revenge for his betrayal and abandonment of her. The conspicuous absence of monsters, creatures which test the boundaries of life in and of themselves, has proven to be the driver of the expedition to begin with. Furthermore, Jason will only succeed in discovering and, eventually, forming an alliance with a monster which he will bring home to wreak revenge on Pelias, and

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<sup>62</sup> Eur. *Med.* 948f.

<sup>63</sup> See note 111 on the 'epic *ipse*', here used twice in relation to Venus; it is also used at 2.196 and 7.176 (see below). See also Hershkowitz (1998b, 181-2) and Elm von der Osten (2007, 143-51).

<sup>64</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 119) notes Jason's similarity to Hercules at 8.230-1. See below for more on Venus and monstrous behaviour.

<sup>65</sup> For Scylla the man-eating monster, see *Od.* 12.89-92. Scylla is a monstrous hybrid, with the familiar and unfamiliar thrown together. See Ogden (2008, 12).

later, on himself. This is ironic since, as we shall see, Jason should be more readily able than most to identify witchy qualities in women, since his own mother has disturbing similarities to Medea. As will become evident, Jason, like Pelias, does not understand monsters and their power, so he fails to protect himself from the danger that Medea presents. Thus the text presents us with a transgressive mission, which is necessary due to a lack of transgressive creatures (monsters), and which culminates in the wedding of the main character to a female monster, in a transgressive location which not only features the violation of a nymph, but in its cave setting also traditionally represents the home of monsters. Before moving on to survey the actual monsters he faces on his quest, we should first consider what Jason is leaving behind.

### **3.4 Home is where the heart is: monsters at Iolchos**

Jason and the Argonauts may be about to experience new trials and dangers on the first sea journey, but at the close of book one there are hints that in fact he might be leaving behind monsters at home. A female character with a small but significant role in the poem, Jason's mother Alcimedē, displays surprising behaviour as her son leaves, and goes on to show an affinity with the dark arts, displaying witchy and disturbing skills in necromancy. Although these talents do not classify Alcimedē as a monster *per se*, they lead her and her husband Aeson into close contact with monsters as they enter the Underworld guided by Crētheus. Furthermore, we shall see that comparisons can be made with another individual with famous skills in the occult, who will soon be the other significant female in Jason's life: Medea. Reading both Alcimedē and Medea against the descriptions of witchy women from earlier

literature reinforces this conclusion, and reveals that Alcimedē's disturbing skills may foreshadow Medea's troubling and potentially monstrous behaviour to come in future years.<sup>66</sup>

As Jason and his crew speed away from his homeland, his parents are left at the mercy of Pelias. Realising the danger Alcimedē takes action by performing a sacrificial rite in order to raise Aeson's father, Cretheus, from the dead (1.730-51). This scene, the only one to explicitly involve the Underworld in the poem, inverts the *katabasis* of Aeneas.<sup>67</sup> An intriguing character, Alcimedē is referred to as Thessalian at 1.737 and 780, and it is clear that she has witchy qualities.<sup>68</sup> The epithet 'Thessalian' coupled with the necromantic rite she performs has invited direct comparisons between Alcimedē and another witch, Lucan's Erictho from *Bellum Civile* book 6.<sup>69</sup> Erictho can be seen as a composite of earlier witchy females such as Circe, Tibullus' witch, Propertius' bawd/procuress, and Ovid's Dipsas. As such, Alcimedē may also be, and we should recognise that Alcimedē is a forerunner for Medea in her association with these individuals.

The first link in the chain of witchy women is Circe. In Homer, she is described by a potential victim (who managed to escape her) as being able to enchant wild animals so they behave like pet dogs, and to change humans into swine in body only, leaving their minds intact and tortured (*Od.* 10 202-69). Circe is of course

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<sup>66</sup> 'Alcimedē functions in the epic as a venerable counterpart to Medea's youthful maiden' (McIntyre 2008, 139).

<sup>67</sup> There may also be hints of Odysseus' Underworld visit too, though the scenes in *Odyssey* 11 are not strictly a *katabasis* in the sense of 'descending'.

<sup>68</sup> *OLD* s.v. 1b; cf. Lucan 6.565 and *Theb.* 3.140. See Zissos (2008, 381 and 384). 'In calling Alcimedē *Thessalis*, Valerius underscores the allusion to Erictho established by his deployment of the *locus horridus*' (McIntyre 2008, 97). Note that Medea calls Jason *Thessale* at 7.437; see Dickey (2002, 181). Hill (1973) argues that references to 'the Thessalian Trick' 'always suggest[ed] the physical removal of the moon down from the sky and were never used to denote eclipse'.

<sup>69</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 132) is 'unclear whether Alcimedē is just observing the rites which are being performed by a cut-rate Erictho (1.735-8, 779-83) or if she herself is the *Thessalis* in charge'. Kleywegt (2005, 427-30) believes Alcimedē to be the opposite of Erictho. See also Spaltenstein (2002, 274), Zissos (2008, 284-5) and McIntyre (2008, 93). See Ogden (2008, 45-56) on Erictho.

presented sometimes as Medea's aunt and sometimes as her sister, and as such is an immediate bridge between the *Odyssey* and the *Argonautica*. Later, Tibullus describes a witch's skills (Tib. 1.2.41-54) in terms of her being able to bring down stars from the skies (Tib. 1.2.45), turn back rivers (Tib. 1.2.46), perform necromantic rites (Tib. 1.2.47-8), and alter the weather (Tib. 1.2.51-2). He also mentions Medea by name: *sola tenere malas Medeae dicitur herbas* ('it is said that she alone possesses Medea's maleficent herbs', Tib. 1.2.47-8).<sup>70</sup> For his part, Ovid also draws upon the Odyssean description of Circe and her origins as he tells the story of the bawd Dipsas (*Am.* 1.8.5-16) and chooses not to mention Medea.<sup>71</sup> Ovid describes Dipsas' skills in detail, and begins by linking her directly to Circe by way of a mention of her island: *illa magas artes Aeaeaeque carmina nouit* ('she has come to know the magic arts and Aeaeae songs', *Am.* 1.8.5).<sup>72</sup> Ovid extends his narrative and describes a number of disturbing and far-fetched skills which he claims Dipsas has: she can turn river back to their sources (*Am.* 1.8.6), affect both the clouds and the sun (*Am.* 1.8.9-10), make the stars drip with blood (*Am.* 1.8.11), and cause lunar eclipses (*Am.* 1.8.12). Interestingly, the description of Dipsas' 'feather-covered' body (*Am.* 1.8.13-5) bears a strong resemblance to the description of Fama's appearance at *Aeneid* 4.178-85: there, she (for Fama is personified as a female) is a creature of bird-like features, with an eye and a mouth under every feather – a monstrous

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<sup>70</sup> Propertius, writing an attack on a bawd (Prop. 4.5.9-18), also considers his subject to be a witch, and also mentions Medea specifically in this regard (Prop. 4.5.41-4). See Heyworth (2007, 455.); Dido also pretends that she wishes Anna to build her a pyre to expunge all feelings for Aeneas from her heart, on the instructions of a 'Massylian' witch, who can do most of the things mentioned by Tibullus see also (*Aen.* 4.477-91).

<sup>71</sup> See Barsby (1973, 91-5) on the potential connections between the representations of witches and bawds in the poetry of Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid; see McKeown (1989, 199-201) on *Am.* 1.8 and Prop. 4.5 displaying 'greater similarities in content and structure than do any two other Augustan elegies', and McKeown (1989, 204-10) on these lines.

<sup>72</sup> McKeown (1989, 205) see *Aeaea* as a reference to 'Circe, or to her niece Medea, or to both'.

appearance in itself.<sup>73</sup> Dipsas therefore begins to resemble a monster during these episodes.<sup>74</sup> Ovid also seems to play with this idea in his language, by writing *Suspikor, et fama est* (*Am.* 1.8.15), a phrase which could point out that there is a rumour, or identify Dipsas as a Rumour-type creature herself.<sup>75</sup> A further point of note in this passage is Ovid's concentration on Dipsas' strange eyes, making a specific reference to her *pupula duplex* (*Am.* 1.8.15) and *gemino lumen ab orbe uenit* (*Am.* 1.8.16);<sup>76</sup> a connection between eyes and monsters will be exploited by Valerius later on. Ovid ends his description of Dipsas by dedicating two lines of narrative to illustrate her necromantic skills (*Am.* 1.8.17-8), skills which Alcimedede herself displays in the *Argonautica*.

Both Circe and Dipsas may be kept in mind when we turn to Lucan's witch Erictho, a character which has been explicitly linked to Alcimedede.<sup>77</sup> She is one of the most prominent characters to feature in Lucan's epic,<sup>78</sup> and there are clear parallels between Erictho and Dipsas. Lucan delays the introduction of Erictho herself by first describing the witch's homeland in terms of the hideous transgressions it spawns. He analyses the topography of Thessaly in detail (*BC* 6.333-412), making reference to the gigantomachy throughout. Interestingly, mention is also made of the Argonauts during this passage (*BC* 6.385). In a passage packed with 'firsts', Lucan explains that it was Thessaly in which war began (*BC* 6.395-405), and makes a further specific reference to the *Argo* by pointing out that it was from this geographical area that the first sea journey began (*BC* 6.400-1). Later, as we learn that Sextus Pompey will look

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<sup>73</sup> McKeown (1989, 209) points out that *anilis* is used in the context of metamorphosis at *Met.* 3.277, 6.43, 14.96 and 14.766. See Laird (1999, 273-4) for Fama as analogous to the poet in the *Aeneid*.

<sup>74</sup> McKeown (1989, 204) sees the powers attributed to Dipsas as 'canonical'.

<sup>75</sup> See Hardie (2012, 390). Ovid writes about the home of Rumour at *Met.* 12.39-63; see Hardie (2012, 150-68).

<sup>76</sup> McKeown (1989, 209) sees a link with the 'evil eye'; Hardie (2012, 390 n. 27) discusses 'thundering' eyes.

<sup>77</sup> See above.

<sup>78</sup> See Johnson (1987, 1-33 and index s.v. Erictho); Masters (1992, 179-215); Radicke (2004, index s.v. Eritcho); Finiello (2005 an overview, with further bibliography); Ogden (2008, 45-56).



to a witch to discover his fate, Lucan makes a third reference to Argonautic themes, by referring to Medea gathering here the witchy herbs which she has not brought from Colchis (*BC* 6.441-2). Lucan then begins to expound on the qualities and skills of the Thessalian women, and the descriptions he gives bear considerable similarities to both Circe and Dipsas: once again, day and night is affected (*BC* 6.461-5); once again rivers run backward, or are straightened out (*BC* 6.473-6); here mountains sink, snows melt and the moon is driven back (*BC* 6.476-0). Like Circe, the witches of Thessaly can also alter the behaviour of animals (*BC* 6.487-91). Only after the scene has been set in this way does Lucan introduce Erictho (*BC* 6.507-830). She reanimates the corpse of a dead soldier to give a cryptic reading of the future to Sextus Pompey, and the process she goes through to achieve this end is narrated in excruciating detail. The qualities seen in both Thessaly as a landscape and in Erictho herself are both seen in Ovid's description of Dipsas, with the necromantic episode taking up the rest of the book in which the episode is contained.

Turning back to the *Argonautica*, Alcimedede is not seen as a woman who can affect the moon or the landscape; however she is obviously well-versed in the dark arts of necromancy. These skills reveal her to be a character familiar with the transgressive. The necromancy scene is brief, but powerful in that Valerius begins by describing how Alcimedede goes about the ritual: *Tartareo tum sacra Ioui Stygiisque ferebat / manibus Alcimedede, tanto super anxia nato / siquid ab excitis melius praenosceret umbris* ('Then Alcimedede was carrying in her hands offerings to Tartarean Jove and the Stygians, in great fear for her mighty son, if shades raised up might give her better foreknowledge', 1.730-2). Aeson, bending to her will, joins in the act (1.733-4), and a trough containing blood and other offerings is described (1.735-6), before Alcimedede cries out to Cretheus to rise again: *saeuorque uocat*

*grandaeua tumultu / Thessalis exanimis ataus magnaue nepotem / Pleiones* ('with a savage cry the aged Thessalian calls out her departed ancestors and the grandson of great Pleion', 1.736-8). The volume of Alcimede's voice reflects her reaction when Jason leaves: *uox tamen Alcimedes planctus supereminet omnis, / femineis tantum illa furens ululatibus opstat, / obruit Idaeam quantum tuba Martia buxum* ('the voice of Alcimede towers over all the other lamentations; her madness withstands such cries of the women, as the Martial trumpet overwhelms the Idaean pipe.' 1.317-9).<sup>79</sup> At no stage is it hinted that Alcimede is unclear or unsure of what she is doing, or that this is the first time she has completed this ritual; indeed, not only does Cretheus' ghost very quickly appear before them, but we also learn that preparations for such mysterious and disturbing procedures were carried out in advance: *hunc sibi praecipuum gentis de more nefandae / Thessalis in seros Ditis seruauerat usus* ('The witch, in the particular custom of her evil kind, had saved [the beast] for use at last in this dire ritual', 1.779-80).

In completing this process, Alcimede displays some of the same necromantic skills briefly ascribed to Dipsas in *Amores* 1.8, and shares distinct similarities to Erictho, with the latter's dark expertise being narrated in detail. Intriguingly, despite Alcimede's familiarity with the occult and obvious past preparations, there is nothing to imply that Jason is familiar with Alcimede's necromantic skill. Jason, naturally close to his mother (at 1.348-9 he holds her up as she weeps at the thought of him leaving), perhaps cannot see anything untoward in such behaviour.

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<sup>79</sup> Hercules' voice is also louder than nature (4.20-1); Pan's voice is *uox omnes super una tubas* (3.51) as he stirs up the Doliones to fight the Argonauts in error. See Hershkowitz (1998b, 131 plus bibliography) on the similarities between Evander (*Aen.* 8.560-84) and Alcimede here. Hypsipyle also shows masculine qualities, having already been given a voice in another work which challenges norms of gender, by Ovid in *Heroides* 6. Hypsipyle is unmarried, yet takes on the role of leader after the extermination of the men, as an *exemplum* of heroic behaviour (See Hershkowitz 1998b, 136). She is a masculine character with very feminine wiles, and the outcome for Jason should teach him that he would have done well to stay with her. Medea will also begin to display masculine qualities as she begins to assert herself in the *Argonautica*, and in Euripides' *Medea*. See Felton (2012, 105) and Lowe (forthcoming) on the female nature of monsters.

Cretheus ultimately advises Alcimedede and Aeson to commit suicide (1.741-51), and after Aeson's initial deliberations on fighting the battle himself (1.752-61),<sup>80</sup> Alcimedede eventually convinces him to join her in doing so (1.762-6).<sup>81</sup> Alcimedede's status as mother and witch may be further underscored as we get the opportunity to read her against the language of monsters, as they are surprisingly introduced when Cretheus accompanies Aeson and Alcimedede into the Underworld. Cretheus shows them *quot limine monstra* ('How many monsters [stand] at the threshold' 1.849), lying in wait for Pelias.<sup>82</sup> The suggestion that monsters live at the very doorway to the Underworld might be usefully brought to mind when Medea, another witchy woman who will marry Jason, hides in Peuce's cave as the Colchians approach *ergo infausto sese occulit antro*, (therefore she hid in the luckless cave, 8.315). Interestingly, *infausto* is a word not only meaning luckless, but also found in Underworld contexts (*OLD* s. v. 1b).

Therefore book 1 ends with, and book 8 involves, Underworld motifs; both are connected to monsters, and both employ the idea of the *locus horridus*.<sup>83</sup> The foregoing analysis shows that these episodes, and the characters of Medea and Alcimedede, are closely tied together. As Medea cowers in book 8, she has not yet killed her brother, as other versions recount. She is hiding in the cave, the usual home of monsters, in which she has just been married to a man she helped kill several monsters, using a variety of witchy spells and potions; a location which was the scene of a sexual attack; a cave now being described using an adjective which is

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<sup>80</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 128-36). For example, Felton (2012, 104) points out that necromantic activity was considered monstrous by the Romans.

<sup>81</sup> See McGuire (1990, 24); Feeney (1991, 336-7); Taylor (1994, 233-5); McGuire (1997, 192); Hershkowitz (1998b, 136); Manuwald (2000, 331-2); Zissos (2003, 672-3); McIntyre (2008, 94-5).

<sup>82</sup> Monsters, which Pelias cannot utilise in life, will be waiting for him in death. See Hershkowitz (1998b, 135-6) who argues that the monsters are a counterpoint for Aeson and Alcimedede, who will be rewarded in their afterlife. For Zissos (2008 *ad loc.*) this phrase owes something to *Aen.* 6.565-76.

<sup>83</sup> McIntyre (2008, 92-102). See also Hershkowitz (1998b, 133-4), who argues that Aeson and Alcimedede's death scene can be compared to the death of Lucan's Pompey (especially at *BC* 8.632-5), specifically in that both wish their deaths to appear a certain way to others.

often used in relation to the Underworld. In book 1, Jason's mother, a Thessalian witch, performs necromancy to bring Cretheus back from the dead; he advises Alcimedea and Aeson to commit suicide, and they journey together to the safety of the Underworld,<sup>84</sup> where he shows them the monsters which live at the threshold. The ideas of frightening, transgressive landscapes and witchy women therefore come together here, and Valerius reminds us of the monsters we might see at the doorway to the Underworld when he has Cretheus ask *quot limine monstra?* at 1.849. Medea seems to be lurking in a place connected to the limits of the Underworld just as she hides from the Colchians in book 8. Alcimedea's status as a witch is also intriguing, for it implies that in Medea, Jason has found another liminal, transgressive creature, capable of witchcraft; indeed, someone similar to his own mother. As we shall see, however, Jason does not understand monsters in the same way as Medea does, despite his own mother displaying similarly mysterious and disturbing qualities of a witch.

There are two final links to be made between Medea and Alcimedea. As we have seen, Valerius builds a picture of Alcimedea the witch through surprisingly few lines. We are able to intertextually compare her to the descriptions of earlier witches to complete the gaps. She resembles the Odyssean account of Medea's sister/aunt Circe; she also resembles Dipsas, who is herself compared to Circe; and finally, in her necromantic skill, she is reminiscent of Erictho. We have seen that both the necromancy episode in book 1 and Medea's attempts to hide from the Colchians have surprising links, but connections between Alcimedea and Jason's paramour may be further strengthened by analysing their witchy behaviour. Juno is searching for a human ally to assist Jason win the Fleece during the civil war at Colchis. She

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<sup>84</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, 135).

surveys the battlefield and spies Medea, and the list of Medea's qualities is striking, made all the more so since the words are Juno's:

*illius ad fretus sparsosque per auiā sucos  
sidera fixa pauent et aui stupet orbita Solis.  
mutat agros fluuiumque uias, suus alligat illi  
cuncta sopor, recolit fessos aetate parentes  
datque alias sine leges colus. hanc maxima Circe  
terrificis mirata modis, hanc aduena Phrixus  
quamuis Atracio lunam spumare ueneno  
sciret et Haemoniis agitari cantibus umbras.*

(‘With confidence, she scatters the scattered potions through the air, the fixed stars are struck with fear and the Sun her grandfather is stupefied in his orbit. She changes the fields and the routes of the rivers, she binds everything in its own slumber, she rejuvenates the aged parents to youth and without laws gives them other threads; at this Circe, greatest in methods of terror, at this the stranger Phrixus wondered, even though she knew the moon foamed with Atracian poison, and that Haemonian spells stirred the shadows’, 6.441-8).<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See Wijsman (2000, *ad loc.*) and Spaltenstein (2005, *ad loc.*) for other comparisons of witchy behaviour; see Ogden (2008, 27-37) on Medea the witch in myth more generally.

There are a number of interesting points of note in this passage from the *Argonautica*. Firstly, Juno makes mention of celestial bodies being affected by Medea's power; she can also turn back rivers to their source. Once again a reference to vision is made, as the narrator explains that Medea's grandfather the Sun became stupefied<sup>86</sup> at the extent of her skills in the dark arts. In a powerful intertextual moment, rather than simply being compared to Circe, here we learn that the older woman looks at Medea in wonder at her power. Finally, Medea herself makes a striking statement during a moment of doubt in her role: '*si tibi Thessalicis,*<sup>87</sup> *nunc et tua forte uenenis / mater et, heu sique est, posset succurrere coniunx!*' ('if only your mother, or perhaps your wife (if – alas! – you have one) were now able to help with Thessalian poisons'', 7.198-9). Medea has somehow made the connection between Jason's mother, whom she has not met and can never meet, and a potential wife, as being kindred spirits in the ways of witchiness. As we know, *she* is the potential spouse, who will marry Jason in a suitably transgressive setting, and she will help him using spells.

Here the links between Medea and Alcimede are made patently clear, in that those witches which have been connected to Alcimede can also be connected to Medea. Jason's lack of understanding of the danger he faces when dealing with Medea is therefore potentially compounded by the experiences he has had with his mother: he sees nothing untoward in her witchiness, and therefore does not expect any danger. At the very least, Jason should be frightened of Medea, given her transgressive nature – but he is not. It is possible to see Medea being foreshadowed in Alcimede, and although their shared disturbing behaviour does not necessarily mean either character is a monster, the language of monsters used as Alcimede and

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<sup>86</sup> Barton (1993, 91) argues 'the fascinated one is stupefied (*stupefactus*). His admiration, his *stupor*, renders him the *stupidus*, the vulnerable one.'

<sup>87</sup> See Hill (1973) on the 'Thessalian trick'.

Aeson brings this idea sharply into focus at a very early stage in the text. The links between Alcimedede and Medea also highlight a further level of transgression, in that if Jason sees his mother in Medea, perhaps natural familial boundaries are being transgressed. There is perhaps a hint of incest in Jason marrying someone so like his own mother.

Pelias lamenting the lack of monsters at 1.33-7 in the process casts the quest in terms of the lack of monsters rather than in terms of retrieval of the Fleece, and sets in motion a chain of transgressive events which will lead to his downfall. The crew will meet several real monsters, but it is important to point out that in fact it seems the Argonauts are actually leaving many monsters behind: in the form of Pelias' potentially monstrous nature as the product of rape, Alcimedede's witchy behaviour which can be linked to Medea, and the Gigantomachic creatures fossilised into the Greek landscape.<sup>88</sup> The *Argo* itself had been explicitly called a *monstrum* by Catullus, and the poet foregrounds monstrous calamities to come by folding a warning into his poetic invocation in line 5. Monsters, and the collapse of boundaries which they represent, are unavoidable in the *Argonautica*. An examination of further depictions of the monstrous is now in order, to explore further the ways in which Valerius uses them as a tool to build his boundary-free world.

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<sup>88</sup> See below for discussion of this.

#### **4: Figurative monsters: Lemnos, Cyzicus and Colchis**

Valerius has firmly underpinned the significance of monsters in the text by alluding to their presence in the invocation of Phoebus,<sup>1</sup> in the motivation for the mission itself, and even in Jason's own mother's behaviour, which is shown to be closely related to that of Medea. Therefore even before the Argonauts face 'real' monsters, such as Amycus or the Harpies, Valerius still builds the monstrous into his work in surprising ways, which prompt us to consider the role they play, and how they make an impact on the wider plot. While the Harpies are possibly the most famous monsters in the Argonautic myth, and while they do play a significant role in Valerius' poem, there is a much bigger pervasion of monsters in this text, as the previous section suggests. Therefore this section of the study, part two of three on monsters, deals with not 'real' manifestations of monstrous entities, but figurative monsters; that is, those characters described as behaving in monstrous ways at pivotal points in the text. Once again, issues of transgression are brought to the fore, since in these episodes, feminine deities shake off their usual behavioural traits and take on the unexpected characteristics of monsters. This behaviour corresponds to the multi-layered instances of transgression which Valerius has knitted into his world, which is free from, or routinely tests, expected boundaries. The use of figurative monsters in this way complements this plan.

On leaving their home, the first stop the Argonauts make is on the island of Lemnos, where they remain for some time. The story of the downfall of the Lemnian men at the hands of their wives involves the intervention of the goddess of love, Venus; however the nature of her involvement undermines our expectations with

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this, see chapter 5.8.



regards to her usual role in the panoply of gods, and also in comparison to earlier versions of this story, such as in Apollonius. Here, Venus takes the unanticipated role of a monstrous figure, assuming not only the characteristics and actions of a Fury (and thus acting out a change of identity), but also enlisting the help of the Fury Fama to help her carry out her malevolent intentions. Similarly, as Medea wavers in her resolve to assist Jason at Colchis, Venus once again assumes a disguise in order to fulfil her wishes. She appears to Medea in the guise of her aunt Circe, dispensing almost entirely with her usual role as the goddess of love to become a monstrous incarnation. Venus behaves in an unexpectedly monstrous way in both of these connected episodes, and it is clear that these facets of her behaviour can all be read as contributions to the later characterisation of the monstrous Medea. By reading both episodes (but particularly the events on Lemnos) against a Virgilian background, it is possible to unpick the intertextual complexity of Valerius' descriptions of these scenes to further explore the transgressive elements therein. Furthermore, it will be clear that Medea is not fooled so easily by Venus' machinations as were the Lemnians, despite her direct and personal involvement in the scene. This demonstrates Medea's growing power, and here we once again begin to build up to the scene which conflates Medea's transgressions and prepares the way for the terrible acts she undertakes in later life: her wedding.

#### **4.1 'The summit of beauty and love'? Venus at Lemnos**

We begin by examining Venus' unexpectedly monstrous behaviour at Lemnos, in book 2. The Lemnian men are mentioned in Homer by Demodocus the bard, in the

court of the Phaeacians (*Od.* 8.295-369). Helios the sun-god reveals to Hephaestus that his wife Aphrodite is involved in an extra-marital affair with Ares, and we learn of the revenge taken by Hephaestus as he discovers them *in flagrante*.<sup>2</sup> The Roman counterparts of these deities now loom into view in the *Argonautica*, as the *Argo* approaches the island of Lemnos, at 2.72f.<sup>3</sup> Here, on this strange island inhabited only by females, Jason will meet the queen Hypsipyle, and learn her story.<sup>4</sup> The Argonauts will be detained for some time here, with a frustrated and angry Hercules eventually moving the party on.<sup>5</sup>

Aside from the Homeric resonance here, the Lemnian narrative can also be read against scenes from the *Aeneid* which describe the behaviour and characteristics of the Fury Allecto. In doing so, it becomes clear that the goddess Venus, not usually monstrous, is being constructed as a similar monster in this text. Allecto is not summoned by Venus, but by Juno, and Virgil's initial description of Allecto makes it clear that Furies are monstrous creatures:<sup>6</sup>

*luctificam Allecto dirarum ab sede dearum*

*infernisque ciet tenebris, cui tristia bella*

*iraeque insidiaeque et crimina noxia cordi.*

*odit et ipse pater Pluton, odere sorores*

<sup>2</sup> See above on Jason and Medea as Venus and Mars on the occasion of their wedding.

<sup>3</sup> For the Lemnian episode in Apollonius, see *Arg.* 1.609-632. For a different take on this episode, with Hypsipyle at its centre, see *Theb.* 5.49-334. Poortvliet (1991, *ad loc.*) discusses the surprising presentation of the Lemnian story in Valerius, in that events are given in reverse.

<sup>4</sup> Poortvliet (1991, *ad loc.*) notes that the sun rises just as the Argonauts arrive, at 2.72; the Sun sets as the Argonauts reach Colchis (5.177-8): *Sol propius flammabat aquas, extremaque fessis coeperat optatos iam lux ostendere Colchos* ('The Sun was burning nearer the waters, and at last the light had now begun to show Colchis to the exhausted men'. See Wijsman (1996, 103) on this scene).

<sup>5</sup> At 2.373-84, Hercules expresses his anger that Argonauts have waited on Lemnos for so long; note that he wants to go and fight *dracones* (382) – not *monstra*, a word which Hercules does not use himself in this text.

<sup>6</sup> See Horsfall (2000, *ad loc.*) on Allecto being 'a Fury in a sense deeper than that of visual attributes' (*ibid.*, 225). For discussion of Valerian parallels with this scene, see Hardie (1990, 7); Poortvliet (1991, 92-100); Hardie (1993, 43-4); Elm von der Osten (2007, 18-52); Hardie (2012, chapter 3, and 197-201).

*Tartareae monstrum:*<sup>7</sup> tot sese uertit in ora,  
tam saeuae facies, tot pullulat atra colubris.

(‘she [Juno] invoked Allecto, bringer of sorrow, from the house of the Furies, from the infernal shadows: in whose heart are miserable wars, angers and deceits, and harmful crimes. A monster, her father Pluto himself hates her, as do her Tartarean sisters: she assumes so many forms, her faces so savage; she wields so many black serpents’, *Aen.* 7.324-9).

Here Allecto is explicitly classified as a *monstrum*, and she is a creature able to change forms. She can therefore adopt disguises easily, in order to pass amongst humans undetected. She is also connected with snakes,<sup>8</sup> and later, on Juno’s instructions Allecto hurls a snake at Amata to enrage her, in the hope that, *furibunda monstro* (‘maddened by the monster’, *Aen.* 7.348), the queen will cause havoc in the household and bring about war with the Trojans.<sup>9</sup> Allecto is therefore a monster who also deals with, and in, monsters. When Amata’s husband Latinus ignores her (until now) measured reasoning, the poison administered by the Fury-monster’s snake begins to work its magic. We learn that Amata is *excita monstribus* at *Aen.* 7.376, and at *Aen.* 7.385, that Allecto is even pretending (*simulato numine Bacchi*) to behave like a Bacchic reveller. Intriguingly, through the potency of *Fama* (a creature to

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<sup>7</sup> Horsfall (2000, *ad loc.*) comments that ‘the term has spread far beyond its origin in the language of portents’ and shows that Virgil uses it of *Fama* (4.181), *Dira* (12.874), *Harpy* (3.214), *Cacus*, *Polyphemus*, and of Allecto again at 7.348’.

<sup>8</sup> On the *dirae*, see e.g. Edgeworth (1983). Note also the description of the *Dirae* at *Aen.* 12.845-8: *Dicuntur geminae pestes cognomine Dirae, / quas et Tartaream Nox intempesta Megaeram / uno eodemque tulit partu paribusque reuinxit / serpentum spiris uentosasque addidit alas*. We do not learn which of the *Dirae* Jupiter has despatched to send his message of cessation to Juturna, but this creature is also able to change forms (*Aen.* 12.862-4): *alitis in paruae subitam conlecta figuram, / quae quondam in bustis aut culminibus desertis / nocte sedens serum canit importuna per umbras*.

<sup>9</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998a, 49-52) on Amata’s madness.

which we shall return below), other women are affected by this infernal snaky poison (*Aen.* 7.392-6), and they begin to rave in a similar way. An important point to note is that Amata's eyes are now bloodshot<sup>10</sup> (*Aen.* 7.399: *sanguineam aciem*) as she turns to address the women to incite them further into rage.

Allecto then infects Turnus in a similar way.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, Allecto does not initially attack Turnus in the same way as she does Amata.<sup>12</sup> Instead, upon reaching Turnus, Allecto begins by demonstrating her aforementioned ability to change shape:

*Allecto toruam faciem et furialia membra  
exuit, in uultus sese transformat anilis  
et frontem obscenam rugis arat, induit albos  
cum uitta crinis, tum ramum innectit oliuae;  
fit Calybe Iunonis anus templique sacerdos,  
et iuueni ante oculos his se cum uocibus offert:*

(‘Allecto threw off her grim appearance and Fury’s shape, transformed her face into that of an old woman, and furrowed her inauspicious brow with wrinkles, took on white hair with headband; she became Calybe, Juno’s old servant-woman, and priestess of her temple, and offered herself to the eyes of the young man with these words’, *Aen.* 7.415-7).

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<sup>10</sup> Here we may recall the description of Dipsas’ unusual eyes in *Amores* 1.8, as well as the description of Medea causing her grandfather the Sun to become stupefied at her behaviour (6.442). See below, on Amycus in the *Argonautica* (4.234-5).

<sup>11</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998a, *passim*) on Turnus’ madness.

<sup>12</sup> See Horsfall (2000, *ad loc.*).

It is of note that ocular issues are also a concern in Allecto's entrancement of Turnus: she 'offers herself to his eyes' (*Aen.* 7.417). Initially unsuccessful, her power begins to take hold as he begins to mock the disguised Allecto (*Aen.* 7.436-444). Allecto's power then successfully overcomes Turnus:

*at iuueni oranti subitus tremor occupat artus,  
deriguere oculi: tot Erinys sibilat hydrys  
tantaque se facies aperit; tum flammea torquens  
lumina cunctantem et quaerentem dicere plura  
reppulit, et geminos erexit crinibus anguis,  
uerberaque insonuit:*

(‘And, as the young man spoke, suddenly a tremor seized his joints, his eyes became fixed: the Fury hissed with so many serpents and such an appearance: then turning her fiery eyes on him, she drove him back as he hesitated and was trying to say more, and she raised a pair of serpents in her hair, and cracked her whip’, *Aen.* 7.446-51)

Like Amata's bloodshot eyes, now Turnus' eyes<sup>13</sup> have become fixed at the site of Allecto. From these extracts, it is clear that monstrous power and eyes, vision and

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<sup>13</sup> Turnus' eyes are a repeated trope towards the end of the *Aeneid*, and once he has been afflicted via Allecto. For example, see *Aen.* 12.657-8, where Saces implores Turnus to help the Latins: *in te ora Latini, in te oculos referent* (it's to you all the Latins look with their faces, their eyes); *Aen.* 12.670: *ardentis oculorum orbis ad moenia torsit* ('he twisted the burning globes of his eyes to the walls'); *Aen.* 12.913-15: *sic Turno, quacumque uiam uirtute petiuit, / successum dea dira negat. tum pectore sensus / uertuntur uarii; Rutulos aspectat et urbem* (Such was Turnus. Whatever attempt at heroism he made, the dire goddess denied him success. Then mixed feelings are turned in his heart; he stares at the Rutulians and the city' – note here also that the Fury – *dira* – is still involved); at *Aen.* 12.930 he speaks to Aeneas *Ille humilis supplexque oculos* ('as a suppliant [with] humble eyes'); Turnus begs

stupefaction are connected. Both Amata and Turnus are overcome by Allecto's power, and she is described, using the language of monsters, as affecting both of these characters' eyes, both in terms of their concrete action, and their perspective on the situation. Allecto the monster also therefore works on the abstract plane of thought, wishes and possibilities.

Turning now to the *Argonautica*, we shall see that the episode in Lemnos is initially dominated by the action of various monsters, one of whom is an unlikely and surprising candidate for such a classification. It quickly becomes apparent that at this point in the story Venus is to play a major role,<sup>14</sup> and some of the Virgilian Allecto's characteristics are in evidence.<sup>15</sup> She is unhappy with the people of Lemnos,<sup>16</sup> and whilst taking action against them, she unexpectedly takes on the behaviour and character traits of a Fury, reflecting aspects of Allecto's behaviour:<sup>17</sup>

*contra Veneris stat frigida semper  
ara loco, meritas postquam dea coniugis iras  
horruit et tacitae Martem tenuere catenae.  
quocirca struit illa nefas Lemnoque merenti  
**exitium furiale** mouet. neque enim alma uideri  
iam tum ea cum<sup>18</sup> tereti crinem subnectitur auro  
sidereos diffusa sinus, **eadem effera et ingens***

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Aeneas at *Aen.* 12.935-6: *et me seu corpus spoliatum lumine mauis / redde meis* ('return me as spoils, or if you prefer, return my sightless corpse').

<sup>14</sup> 'In the Lemnos episode Venus gets a chance to show the havoc she could wreak if she were playing a more central role in the *Argonautica*' (Hershkowitz 1998b, 178).

<sup>15</sup> See Hardie (1990, 5-9) and (1993, 43) on the similarities between Virgil's Allecto and Venus, as well as the 'practically indistinguishable' (*ibid* 1990, 6) nature of the workings of Venus, Juno and the Furies in Valerius Flaccus. See below on Juno's appearance in disguise to Medea.

<sup>16</sup> See Spaltenstein (2002, 331-5) for discussion of this episode, with comparisons to the story in Statius' *Thebaid*.

<sup>17</sup> See Feeney (1991, 78 and n. 75) on Aphrodite's role in Apollonius.

<sup>18</sup> Liberman (1997, 833-4) points out the difficult nature of this passage.

*et maculis suffecta genas pinumque sonantem*  
*uirginibus Stygiis nigramque simillima pallam*

(‘But in that place the altar of Venus stands always neglected, since the day when the goddess cowered before her husband’s warranted anger, and Mars was held fast in silent chains. For this reason she puts together evil, and like a Fury schemes destruction for deserving Lemnos; for now she does not seem kindly: then she with her hair being bound tightly with gold and starry cloak spread out, is that same goddess, wild and huge, with spots marking her cheeks; she resembles the Stygian maidens with crackling torch and black mantle’, 2.98-106).<sup>19</sup>

Venus exacting revenge for not keeping up worship at her shrine is the key here, signalled by *exitium furiale*.<sup>20</sup> Of note is the emphasis placed upon the way Venus *appears*, with Valerius using the key standard epithet of *alma*<sup>21</sup> to highlight the contrast (2.102): *neque enim alma uideri*.<sup>22</sup> This seems to be a transgression by Venus herself, stepping out of her usual role and displaying behaviour which is out of the ordinary, as she assumes the role of an infernal goddess to wreak havoc upon

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<sup>19</sup> See below for discussion of the links between this passage and 7.250f, as well as Stadler (1993, 98-9) and Spaltenstein (2005, 279-80).

<sup>20</sup> Hardie (2012, 199). On Venus as a Fury here see Hershkowitz (1998b, with further bibliography).

<sup>21</sup> A *PHI* search for *alma ~ Venus* brings up 42 matches, with Ovid using the phrase most frequently.

<sup>22</sup> See Spaltenstein (2002, 337-8) for discussion of this passage. For Hershkowitz (1998b, 178), here ‘The narrator hints that Venus will take both Juno’s role as instigator and Allecto’s role as actor’: Venus has a ‘double nature’. This hybridity, and preoccupation with appearances (and thus vision), fits in well with the characteristics of monsters.

the Lemnian women.<sup>23</sup> Later, as the men return, Venus brandishes a torch, with the poet highlighting the unexpected nature of Venus' behaviour here by using *ipsa*<sup>24</sup> in a prominent position:

*ipsa Venus quassans undantem turbine pinum  
adglomerat tenebras pugnaeque adcincta trementem  
desilit in Lemnon;*

(‘Venus herself, brandishing a surging pine torch with a whirl, brings about gloom and dressed for the fight, leapt down into trembling Lemnos’, 2.196-8).<sup>25</sup>

Venus-the-Fury will wreak havoc on the Lemnians, and later, even on Medea.<sup>26</sup> Here, Venus initially seems to be taking a role similar to the creature called upon by Juno in the *Aeneid*; there, Juno left Allecto to do her work as a proxy.<sup>27</sup> Venus seems more than happy to take on the role of the Fury herself, and to adopt their appearance, a factor highlighted by Valerius, and which may point to the shape-

<sup>23</sup> See Hardie (1990, 5-9) on the usual dual nature of Olympian gods, which is being built upon here; see Hershkowitz (1998b, 177-82) on the ‘devaluation’ of Venus in this text.

<sup>24</sup> ‘This is a staggering use of the epic *ipse*’ (Hardie 2012, 200), described as the ‘emphatic use of *ipse* where identity is fluid’. See also Hardie (2002, 278 and index s.v. *ipse*) on *ipse* in Ovid. It is also used of Venus at 8.234, and by Venus about herself at 2.134 and 7.176. More on this below.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Here Venus appears with the torch of a Fury, ready not for love but for the business of her husband Mars’ (Hardie 2012, 200).

<sup>26</sup> See below, for discussion of events in book 7.

<sup>27</sup> Juno, desperate to help Turnus, fashions a *monstrum* to look and behave like Aeneas: *tum dea nube caua tenuem sine uiribus umbram / in faciem Aeneae (uisu mirabile monstrum) / Dardaniis ornat telis, clipeumque iubasque / diuini adsimulat capitis, dat inania uerba, / dat sine mente sonum gressusque effingit euntis, / morte obita qualis fama est uolitare figuras / aut quae sopitos deludunt somnia sensus*. (‘Then from the cavernous mist the goddess equipped a tenuous shade without strength, in the likeness of Aeneas, with Trojan weapons (a strange monster to behold); she simulated his shield, and the plumes on his divine head, gave it inane words, gave it sound without mind, and mimicked the way he walked: like shapes that flit, they say, after death, or dreams that in sleep deceive the senses.’ *Aen.* 10.636-42) Notice that *fama est* is used here, but meaning ‘as they say’, rather than a true evocation of the personified Fama. Nevertheless, the link is made.



shifting role traditionally assigned to the Furies. The transgression is therefore two-fold: her change of role from goddess into something else is transgressive, and the role itself into which she transforms, that of monster, is a transgressive entity.

Meanwhile, the Lemnians have been fighting abroad, and are returning victorious (2.107-14). This is Venus' cue, and despite already resembling the Furies, she comes to Earth to find an assistant in her evil doings: Fama (2.115-24).<sup>28</sup> We learn that Fama sees Venus first (2.124), and approaches her.<sup>29</sup> Venus still feels the need to incite her further, however, and instructs Fama to plant the rumour abroad that the men are returning *luxu turpique cupidine captos* ('as captives of luxury and greed', 2.131), and have taken mistresses.<sup>30</sup> She ends by declaring that "*mox ipsa adero ducamque paratas*" ('Soon I myself will be there and will lead them once they are prepared', 2.134).<sup>31</sup> Not unlike Allecto in the *Aeneid*, Fama's first steps are to assume a disguise, and to approach Eurynome, a faithful Lemnian woman who has not ceased to spin wool in the absence of her husband (2.135-40). It is perhaps not so surprising that the Valerian Fama, an already monstrous creature,<sup>32</sup> can also play the Virgilian Fury very well; she takes on the appearance of Neaera (*huic dea cum lacrimis et nota ueste Neaerae / icta genas*, 2.141-2) and tells her false news to Eurynome (2.142-60).<sup>33</sup> The contagiousness of Fama's words is akin to that of the Fury Allecto's words in *Aeneid* 7 when we are told that *transit ad Iphinoen isdemque*

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<sup>28</sup> Arguably, Juno behaves like *Fama* at 1.95-9 as she advertises the Argonautic mission.

<sup>29</sup> For Hardie (2012, 199) this is an unusual approach for Fama, as in her guise as Rumour, her actions are usually self-motivating.

<sup>30</sup> Bernstein (2008, 50-2) sees the swiftness of the violence here as revealing 'the fragility of the family as an institution' (ibid. 50) and links the episode at Lemnos to 'a wider inversion of social norms' (ibid. 51-2).

<sup>31</sup> Hardie (1993, 44) discusses the 'constant threat to identity', and link between this instance of *ipsa* and that at 2.196, where Venus appears brandishing the torch.

<sup>32</sup> See above.

<sup>33</sup> As Laird (1999, 101) points out, the Famas of Virgil, Statius and Valerius are never given direct discourse. For more on Fama, see Laird (1999, *passim*) and Hardie (1986, 278) and (2012, *passim*).

*Amythaonis implet | Oleniique domum furiis* ('she moves on to Iphinoe, and spreads the same furies in the home of Amythaon and Olenius', 2.162-3).

Whereas we might expect Fama to behave in such a monstrous way, it is something of a surprise to see Venus *herself (ipsa)* assume a false identity and become directly involved in the action in this manner,<sup>34</sup> reminiscent of Allecto the Fury in the *Aeneid*.<sup>35</sup> Venus appears: *has inter medias Dryopes in imagine maestae | flet Venus et saeuis ardens dea planctibus instat* ('in the middle of things the goddess Venus, in the guise of sorrowful Dryope and burning with savage complaints, stands and weeps', 2.174-5).<sup>36</sup> She begins a speech to rouse the unsuspecting women (2.176-84) and as she ceases, she is described as *tunc ignea torquens | lumina* ('then rolling her flashing eyes', 2.184-5).<sup>37</sup> Once again, the action of the eyes is symbolic and is obviously connected to the conduct of monstrous entities; Venus' eyes flash just as Allecto's eyes were 'fiery' as she began to take hold of Turnus. Similarly, just as Amata's eyes became bloodshot as Allecto's power took hold, Venus' words make the Lemnian women gaze out to sea as one *aequora cunctae | prospiciunt* (2.187-8);<sup>38</sup> and indeed, just as Turnus becomes transfixed by Allecto at her full

<sup>34</sup> We know that Venus can appear in disguise, as she did to her son Aeneas at *Aen.* 1.314-410, but Venus' motives for appearing in disguise there are not characterised in the same malevolent way as they are here, despite Aeneas' censure of her when he realises her true identity (*Aen.* 1.407-9). Venus also sends others in disguise; see for example Cupid's intervention at Carthage (*Aen.* 1.657-756).

<sup>35</sup> 'In literary-historical terms the picture is the product of 'combinational imitation' of the *Aeneid*, in which the actions of Venus and Allecto, separately narrated, reveal a disturbing similarity to one another. But Valerius goes beyond Virgil to suggest that Venus has a self-contained *persona* as a "Fury"' (Hardie 1993, 43).

<sup>36</sup> See Poortvliet (1991, *ad loc.*). In addition to this scene, we should note that in one of her many schemes, Juno sends Iris to earth to incite the Trojan women to set fire to the ships after Anchises' funeral games: *Ergo inter medias sese haud ignara nocendi | conicit, et faciemque deae uestemque reponit; | fit Beroë, Tmarii coniunx longaeua Dorycli, | cui genus et quondam nomen natique fuissent; | ac sic Dardanidum mediam se matribus infert:* ('Hardly ignorant herself of doing harm, Iris hurls herself therefore into the middle of things, and puts down both the clothing and appearance of a goddess; she becomes Beroë, the elderly wife of Tmarian Doryclus, whose status, name and children she had once; and as such infiltrated the Dardanian matrons', *Aen.* 5.618-22). Venus appears *inter medias* just as Iris did to the Trojan women. On *Aeneid* 5, see Putnam (1962); Galinsky (1968); Harris (1968-9); Miller (1995).

<sup>37</sup> 'The whole episode is shot through with echoes of Virgil's Dido and her 'transformation' into a Fury' (Hardie 1993, 44).

<sup>38</sup> Cf Turnus' actions at *Aen.* 12.915 (see above).

force, the Lemnian men become similarly entranced by their wives' terrifying new behaviour, which is once again explicitly connected to the Furies:

*adeo ingentes inimica uideri  
diua dabat, notaque sonat uox coniuge maior;  
tantum oculos pressere < . . . . . > uelut agmina cernant  
Eumenidum ferrumue super Bellona coruscet.*

('the angry goddess made them seem so huge, and the voice  
resounds louder than the familiar wife; they cover their eyes  
as though they saw the ranks of the Eumenides, or Bellona  
flashed her sword above them', 2.225-8).<sup>39</sup>

Here, Venus creates intense and frightening levels of hysteria and havoc in Lemnos. She does thus by using all of her own powers of disguise and terror, as well as employing as her side-kick the fearful power of the Fury-like Fama, with Venus all the while evincing her own Fury-like qualities. Venus is presented in this text as not only working in cahoots with the Fury Fama, but also demonstrating a hybrid nature of benignity and terror, the appropriation of which utilises such surprising qualities. This hybrid nature makes the goddess unusually difficult to classify as anything but a monster, and although she is seen in disguise in earlier literature (such as in the

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<sup>39</sup> See Spaltenstein (2002, 370) on these lines. The women look but also sound terrifying, an image which is reminiscent of Alcimedé (1.317-9 – she is louder than 'all the other mothers'), Pan (3.51 – his voice is louder than 'all the war trumpets'), and Hercules (4.20-1 – his voice is louder than 'all nature'). Alcimedé is seen as masculine in her reaction (see above), as well as having 'monstrous' capabilities in her necromantic skills; Pan is calling to the Doliones to rise against the Argonauts in error, and in his description Valerius comments that not even the Furies could sweep away the armies he summons (3.53-5); Hercules the great monster-slayer is louder than nature as he cries out for the missing Hylas (see discussion below for more on this).

*Aeneid*),<sup>40</sup> nowhere else is she seen in such a terrifying form, in which Venus' very identity comes into question.<sup>41</sup> Once again, a combination of transgressive issues come to the fore. Venus takes on all of the qualities of the Furies in her assailing of the Lemnian women, and seems to take Allecto, the Fury prompted by Juno in the *Aeneid*, as her inspiration. For Valerius to use the language of *monstra* here is entirely appropriate, therefore, as Venus is not like 'Venus' at all: she is like a Fury, like Allecto, and like Juno in earlier texts.<sup>42</sup>

The women of Lemnos, being subjected to this terrifying assault, seem to stand no chance of being able to resist;<sup>43</sup> and as if to underscore the significance of this dire situation, Valerius interrupts his account with an authorial intervention which recognises that monsters are at work.<sup>44</sup>

*Unde ego tot scelerum facies, tot fata iacentum*

*exequar? heu, uatem **monstris** quibus intulit ordo,*

<sup>40</sup> For example see *Aeneid* 1, where Venus appears in disguise to Aeneas. On this, see Reckford (1995-6); Smith (2005) 24-8 with further bibliography.

<sup>41</sup> Hardie (1993, 43).

<sup>42</sup> 'The Virgilian Allecto episode informs the structure of the whole passage' (Hardie 1990, 7). See also the exchange between Juno and Venus at *Aen.* 4.90-128; Juno recognises that Rumour will not dampen Dido's ardour for Aeneas (*Aen.* 4.91-2) and so asks Venus to work with her once again. On the connections between this scene and Apollonius Rhodius, see Nelis (2001, 93-6 and index s.v. Cupid). For Hershkowitz (1998b, 179), in 'accentuating the Fury-like qualities of Vergil's Venus, Valerius effects not only a devaluation of the goddess in his own text, but also, to a certain extent, a retrospective devaluation of Venus in the *Aeneid* itself'.

<sup>43</sup> Though note that Hypsipyle, the only woman to *not* kill the man in her life (her father), seems also to be the only one who recognises that a Fury-like attack has taken place: *iamque senem tacitis saeua procul urbe remotum / occulerat siluis, ipsam sed conscius ausi / nocte dieque Pauor fraudataque turbat Erinys*. (And now she hid the old man she'd taken away, far from the savage city in a silent wood, but by day and night fear and the knowledge of her daring disturbs her, and Erinys, cheated', 2.279-81). On this, see Spaltenstein (2002, 386): 'La "Furie" des vers 2.196 sqq. est Venus elle-même et Valerius n'a pas mentionné alors que les véritables Furies aient pris part à ce massacre. Mais Erinys 281 ne peut guère désigner Venus et Valerius pense maintenant à une vraie Furie qui va venger la fraude commise à l'égard de Venus (Furiis 294, conjectural, procéderait de la même idée), peut-être aussi parce que les Furies évoquent le délire guerrier (vers 4.617) et donc cette nuit meurtrière à Lemnos, de même qu'elle apparaîtront lors du carnage devant Cyzique (vers 3.214).' He points out that *Theb.* 5.201f has the Furies leading the massacre, and wonders if this situation is inspired by Valerius.

<sup>44</sup> Spaltenstein (2002, 368-369) highlights the difference between invocations to the Muse and authorial intervention.

*quae se aperit series! o qui me uera<sup>45</sup> canentem  
sistat et hac nostras exsoluat imagine noctes!*

(‘How might I record so many scenes of wickedness, so many fates of the fallen? Alas, amongst which monsters has this story brought the poet? What chain of events opens before me! Oh that some hand would check my too faithful tongue, and release me from this vision in the night!’ 2.216-9)<sup>46</sup>

Here the poet explicitly acknowledges the sheer number of monsters which surround his characters at this point in the text, and the difficulty in narrating such transgressive themes. Perhaps this relates to the difficulty one faces when attempting to successfully pin down entities which so easily evade description. As if to underscore the point, Valerius intervenes once again when Hypsipyle is introduced into the text, and once again, he uses the language of monsters to do so:

*non ulla meo te carmine dictam  
abstulerint, durent Latiis modo saecula fastis  
Iliacique Lares tantique palatia regni.  
inruerant actae pariter nataeque nurusque  
totaque iam sparsis exarserat insula monstris.*

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<sup>45</sup> In a passage which so heavily involves the machinations of Fama, the emphasis on ‘truth’ here is striking. See Zissos (1999b, 297) on *Aen.* 1.43-50 and the ‘plasticity of poetic truth’. See also Feeney (1991, 247-9), and Hardie (2012 199-201).

<sup>46</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998a, 66) on Valerius ‘running the risk of madness’ while narrating this episode because of the nature of the tale.

You, told in my song, nothing will remove; in the same way  
the Latin bear the centuries, and the Ilian Lares and the  
palace of our great realm. Daughters and daughters-in-law,  
under the same influence had rushed in, and now the whole  
island was ablaze with scattered monsters', 2.244-8).<sup>47</sup>

These are striking moments of poetic assertion, which mark Valerius' trouble with dealing with these sorts of episode. Yet, despite the mention of monsters in both interventions, there are in fact no physical monsters to fight here: the Argonauts have yet to face Amycus or any other monstrous creature directly. Despite this, Valerius expresses unease at having to speak about facing monsters on some symbolic level, bringing himself into the plot just as his characters face monsters. In addition to this, the monsters we have learned about so far made their appearance in an earlier part of the story, not covered by the narrative involving the Argonauts, who are only connected to the Lemnian women in the aftermath of the massacre. The inclusion of powerful monster-like creatures at this stage in the text is significant, as the actions of Venus and Fama ultimately influence Jason and the Argonauts' decision to delay in Lemnos. In this regard, the transgressive behaviour of the Goddess of Love, behaviour which took place prior to the Argonauts' arrival, plays a pivotal role in one of the longer sections of the text in the poem. The women's attitudes towards their husbands are drastically altered by these actions, changing their perception of their husbands and ultimately driving the women to a murderous conclusion. Venus appears as a Fury as she carries out her plan, with her eyes physically changing as

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<sup>47</sup> Valerius links the survival of Hypsipyle's story with the survival of Rome; cf. Horace *Odes* 3.30, Ovid *Met.* 15.877-9 and *Amores* 1.15 (see Poortvliet 1991, *ad loc.*). See also Williams (1978, 198), Hershkowitz (1998, 137) for more on this intervention; see Dominik (1997) and Clare (2004) for comparisons between the Apollonian and Valerian episodes on Lemnos, and Gibson (2004) for more on Statius' 'response'.

she manifests as a monster. Furthermore, working under the orders of Venus, Fama also infects the women by making them believe that the men have transgressed by taking concubines during their time away from the island. Transgression of usual roles, appearances and attitudes is therefore at play in the very background of book 2, and these transgressions are played out via the medium of monsters.

Hypsipyle, the heroine of Lemnos, is not herself classified as a monster. She is a strong female character, and has many antecedents and inevitable comparisons have been made.<sup>48</sup> Hypsipyle stands out from the rest of the Lemnian women because she resists the lure of the Furies and Venus, and is the only woman to do so. Medea, the next strong human female character to feature in the story, will not be so lucky. When Venus visits Medea in book 7 to reinforce the maiden's lust for Jason,<sup>49</sup> her treatment of the Colchian will be as destructive and monstrous as her treatment of the Lemnian women.

#### **4.2 'And Venus was her name': Venus at Colchis**

The episode on Lemnos is not the only section of text in which Venus appears in disguise.<sup>50</sup> When Medea is beginning to doubt the extent of her involvement with Jason, Venus once again changes her appearance (in the monstrous manner of the Furies) in order to achieve her ends. In scenes highly reminiscent of those at Lemnos, Venus recognises that she must turn up the pressure on a wavering Medea in order

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<sup>48</sup> 'It is inevitable to compare Dido and Hypsipyle' (Hershkowitz 1998b, 139; 138-46); see also Garson (1964, 272-3) and Clare (2004). For the Apollonian Dido and Hypsipyle, see Hunter (1993, 50-1), and for the Apollonian Hypsipyle and Virgil's Dido, Nelis (2001, index s.v. Hypsipyle).

<sup>49</sup> See Adamietz (1976, 87) and Nyberg (1992, 157 and 178-9) for more on the parallels between Venus' treatment of the Lemnians and her treatment of Medea in Valerius and Apollonius respectively.

<sup>50</sup> See Hardie (1990, 9) for important Virgilian parallels to this scene.

for Jason to retrieve the Fleece with the maiden's help. Venus once again assumes the appearance of a new identity in order to do this, and the reaction of her quarry once again involves vision and eyes. However, while the persuasive rhetoric employed by Venus-as-Circe is in the end a success,<sup>51</sup> Medea displays significant differences in behaviour to the Lemnians when she encounters Venus, in that she is not immediately fooled by what she sees. In comparing the two episodes (and also when we considering the Apollonian Medea),<sup>52</sup> we begin to see that this Medea is something special; a strong woman who is more than able to hold her own amongst powerful deities, and monstrous ones at that, a foreboding sign for those humans who wish to be involved with her in future, and a sign that Medea is well able to transgress boundaries of humanity in dealing with the divine.

Despite being given Venus' magic girdle and having been intoxicated by the sight of Jason in battle,<sup>53</sup> and despite hearing the toils her father now has in store for the hero (7.35-77), Medea begins to waver. She dreams that her countrymen and Jason kneel either side of her (7.141-4), a representation of the *amor* (or indeed *furor*) and *pudor* which are causing such turmoil within her.<sup>54</sup> When she awakes, she is compared to Orestes as he grapples with the realities of the Furies.<sup>55</sup> Medea has decided that she is not going to help him (7.205-9). Juno and Venus are concerned by this development, and Venus recognises that the only way forward is to take direct action herself. She articulates this by saying:

*sed me ipsa opus*

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<sup>51</sup> See Stover (2011).

<sup>52</sup> See Bernstein (2008, 55-61) for the episode's originality.

<sup>53</sup> For discussion of these episodes, including Juno's disguise as Chalciope, see below.

<sup>54</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998a, 32) on Valerius' appropriation of the Apollonian Medea's 'wish-fulfilment dream' and Dido's tragic dream (*Aen.* 4.465-6), along with a discussion of the Valerian Medea's madness.

<sup>55</sup> Hershkowitz (1998a, 33).



(‘I myself am needed’, 7.176).<sup>56</sup>

This is a highly significant statement, given that in fact in some respects it will not be Venus ‘herself’ who gets involved at this stage, but Venus-in-disguise. In the meantime, in Colchis Medea underscores her doubts about her involvement with the Argonautic quest by giving voice to them. She wishes aloud that Jason’s mother or potential wife were present to aid them in their witchy activities instead of her (7.198-9).<sup>57</sup> With a sense of certainty in her words, she hopes that she will not be present when Jason dies (7.201) and that she is not compelled to leave, and therefore join her sister Chalciope (‘*iterum durae cogar comes ire sorori*’, 7.202). Venus spots this familial weakness in Medea and seeks to exploit it, responding by transforming herself into Medea’s aunt, Circe,<sup>58</sup> and appearing before Medea on her bed:

*Ecce toro Venus inprovisa resedit,  
sicut erat, mutata deam<sup>59</sup> mentitaque pictis  
uestibus et magica Circen Titanida uirga*

(‘Look, unexpectedly,<sup>60</sup> Venus has sat on the bed, as if  
changed from being a goddess, and imitating the Titan’s

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<sup>56</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998a, 33-4 and 1998b, 180 with further bibliography) and Spaltenstein (2005, 262) on this phrase. See note 111 on the ‘epic *ipse*’. The demonstrative pronoun *ipsa* is used about Venus at 2.196 and 8.234, and by Venus of herself at 2.134 and 7.176.

<sup>57</sup> See above on the connections between Alcimedea and Medea. Talierco (1992, 107) points out that this could be the moment in which Medea realises that *she* may be the *coniunx*.

<sup>58</sup> Circe herself is of dubious status: see Stover (2011) for discussion of her mortal/divine hybrid nature. On these lines, see Stadler (1993, 87-8).

<sup>59</sup> Perutelli (1997, 271) makes a link with *dissimulata deam* at *Silv.* 1.2.14, meaning Venus. On Circe as a deity in Valerius, see Stover (2011). Spaltenstein (2005, 269) makes a direct comparison between Venus’ change here and her disguise at 2.141; he goes on: ‘Valerius s’est déjà servi de ce motif rebattu dans le doublet de cet épisode aux vers 6.479 sqq. et sa répétition rend plus sensible encore son caractère de convention; mais ce récit désinvolte s’en contente’ (Spaltenstein, *ibid.*).

<sup>60</sup> Stover (2011, 174) argues that ‘like Medea, we too are caught off guard by the appearance of “Circe” in Colchis, perhaps even more so than Medea herself’. However, as Venus has already

daughter Circe,<sup>61</sup> with painted robes and magic wand', 7.210-12).

Once again, Venus has adopted a disguise to inflict pain on her unknowing victim.<sup>62</sup> It is telling that Venus' current appearance has an effect on Medea which is in some ways similar to that which she had on the Lemnian women:<sup>63</sup>

*Illa, velut lenti fallatur imagine somni,  
sic oculos incerta tenet magnique sororem  
paulatim putat esse patris. Tum flebile gaudens  
prosiliit saeuaeque ultro tulit oscula diuae*

(‘She [Medea], as if being fooled by an image of a lingering dream, holds her eyes, uncertain, and only gradually thinks her to be the sister of her great father’, 7.214-6).

This seems to suggest that Medea spends an uncertain amount peering at Venus-Circe, but it would not be correct to assume that she is stupefied; rather, she is seemingly initially unconvinced that Circe is in fact before her, and waits a moment for her eyes to adjust to what she is seeing.<sup>64</sup> At length she is convinced, and throws

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announced that she ‘herself’ (*ipsa*) would be needed, and since this word is used previously by the goddess when she adopts a disguise, it seems her appearance may not in actual fact be quite so unexpected.

<sup>61</sup> Stover (2011, 174) argues that in being prompted to behave like Circe, Medea is effectively being asked to be like her own character ‘as it emerges in the literary tradition’.

<sup>62</sup> See Elm von der Osten (2007, 106-58) on Venus personified as *Liebefuror*. Stover (2011, 173) argues that Venus does this ‘largely in order to use Circe’s life as a paradigm for Medea to follow’.

<sup>63</sup> See Stover (2011, 173) on Venus arriving ‘ostensibly to transform Medea into a duplicate version of the individual whom she is impersonating’, and the same occurring in Lemnos (i.e. to turn the Lemnian women into Furies).

<sup>64</sup> Hershowitz (1998b, 262) calls this a ‘suspension of disbelief’.

herself at ‘Circe’, delighted to see her (7.215-22). The pair discuss the situation Medea faces, with Venus-Circe using all of her wiles to convince Medea that aiding Jason is the best course of action (7.217-247);<sup>65</sup> however Medea, showing tenacity not shown by either the Lemnians or the Doliones when faced with a monstrous deity, is once more unconvinced: she able to literally ‘see through’ Venus’ act; added to that, there is something yet more disturbing to be seen in Venus’ appearance:

*“Tu quoque nil, mater, prodes mihi ; fortior ante  
sola fui. Tristes thalamos infestaque cerno  
omnia, uipereos ipsi tibi surgere crines.”*

(‘You too, mother, are of no help to me. I was stronger alone  
before. I discern a sad marriage and everything harmful, and  
vipers rising up out of your hair’, 7.248-50).<sup>66</sup>

It has been suggested that in actual fact here Medea is lost, and that she is no longer able to recognise her own familiar environment due to this encounter, ‘qui lui serait

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<sup>65</sup> See Augoustakis (2010, 1-2) on Venus urging Medea to ‘become Roman’; and Stover (2011) on Venus’ tactics of various *exempla*, which in the end all encourage Medea to be incarnations of herself in earlier literature.

<sup>66</sup> Stadler (1993, 98) comments that ‘offenbar unterbricht Medeas Rede eine kurze Reflexion, die ihr zu der Erkenntnis verhilft, daß sie von ihrer Tante keine Unterstützung zu erwarten hat’. Hershkowitz (1998a, 33) reads this as recalling ‘Pentheus’ altered perception of Dionysus in the *Bacchae* (920-2)’. Spaltenstein (2005, *ad loc*) sees a link between the *thalamos* and the Furies: ‘Mais *thalamos* peut aussi designer le repaire infernal des Furies d’après Vergil *Aeneid* 6,280 *ferrei... Eumenidum thalami*, que Médée penserait voir, de même que la fausse Circé lui semble prendre l’apparence d’une Furie (*tristes* ayant alors le même sens du ‘lugubre’). Cette seconde explication est sans doute préférable à cause du parallélisme avec Verg. Chez Apoll.3,703 sq., Chalciope menace Médée de venir la tourmenter comme une Furie en sortant des enfers: cette idée est trop éloignée de Valerius pour qu’on y voie la source de ces vers. Comme Mozley, Libermann traduit *thalamos* par ‘mariage’, mais sans convaincre (et Valerius 1,226, qu’il cite, donne a *thalamos* le sens de ‘chambre’). Ces *viperei crines* sont ceux de Furies (vers 2,195), a qui Valerius a déjà assimilé Venus (vers 2,104 sqq. et 196 sqq.), certes dans une autre circonstance, mais avec les mêmes éléments. *Surgere* dit un mouvement de menace, tel qu’on en décrit souvent pour les serpents (vers 2,502 et Valerius 2,213, parallèle).

devenu hostile comme sa tante lui semble l'être'.<sup>67</sup> However in many ways, Medea has once again demonstrated a moment of strength.<sup>68</sup> Before her arrival, Venus has already correctly perceived that Medea is not weak-willed, and her descent to Colchis is designed to redouble her efforts and increase her potency in convincing Medea that Jason needs her help. However the power of Venus remains in doubt even after her initial rhetoric, as Medea gives voice to what she is able to see in Venus: a snaky-haired Fury, animals reminiscent of Allecto's appearance.<sup>69</sup> It is natural that given the association between what Medea can see in the disguised Venus and what Turnus can see in the disguised Allecto (*Aen.* 7.446-51), that we should make comparisons between the episodes. However in contrast to Turnus, Medea is not stupefied or sent into a panic; in fact she seems to calmly announce what she can see. It has been suggested that in some respects Medea is gazing into a mirror in this scene, and can see a vision of what she herself will one day become.<sup>70</sup> As if to underscore this Fury-like future, Venus ups the ante once again by utilising the power of her embrace to ensure that any of Medea's remaining doubts are brushed away:

*talia uerba dabat conlapsaque flebat iniquae*

*in Veneris Medea sinus pestemque latentem*

*ossibus atque imi monstrabat pectoris ignem.*<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 279).

<sup>68</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, 262) on Medea's lack of understanding of what she sees; she also cites Seneca's nurse seeing the frenzied Medea: *uultum Furoris cerno. di fallant metum!* ('I see the face of a Fury. May the gods be misleading my fear!', *Med.* 396) as a character who 'wants to be deceive, but sees the 'truth' about her mistress'. Stover (2011, 182) likens this scene to Medea 'looking into a mirror [...] Medea fleetingly discerns the indelible image of her future, 'furious', (*Eur. Med.* 1260).

<sup>69</sup> See above.

<sup>70</sup> Stover (2011, 182) on Medea 'fleetingly discern[ing] the indelible image of her future, 'furious' self (*Eur. Med.* 1260).

<sup>71</sup> 'Medea's unconscious awareness of the goddess' true identity demonstrates the power Venus' erotic madness exerts over her' (Hershkowitz 1998a, 34).

*occupat amplexu Venus et furialia figit*

*oscula permixtumque odiis inspirit amorem*

(‘Medea said words such as these and, having collapsed, was crying on Venus’ hostile breast, and showed how the pestilence lay in her bones and the fire was in her deepest soul. Venus envelops her in her embrace and gives her Fury-like kisses, and inspires love mixed with hate’, 7.251-5).<sup>72</sup>

Venus now turns to the power of her embrace in order to ensnare Medea.<sup>73</sup> This course of actions seems to highlight Venus’ bafflement at not being immediately successful in overcoming Medea with her powers of disguise. Medea saw through her initial salvo, and as she collapses on her ‘aunt’s’ breast, Venus seems to recognise the need to call upon her original and more traditional powers as goddess of love in order to fully overcome Medea. While this course of action may seem unexceptional – after all, Circe is Medea’s aunt, thus Medea may seem nothing untoward in this show of affection – Venus actually gives Medea ‘Fury-like’ kisses, *furialia oscula*, not the calming and soothing kisses of a maternal figure or comfort-giver. Kisses are usually in the repertoire of a lover, a role which Venus herself is not playing here, though of course she wishes to inspire this reaction in Medea, in the direction of Jason. In trying to analyse Venus’ actions, it is easy to become confused in interpreting what is happening, a reaction which arguably mirrors Venus’ own actions themselves: she herself has become confused, and attempts a last-ditch reversion to her traditional role to achieve her ends, since Medea has discerned the

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<sup>72</sup> See Stadler (1997, 97-8).

<sup>73</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 279-81) argues that Venus might gradually inspire love in Medea, but that here this occurs suddenly; Medea is more powerful than we might initially think.

snaky-Fury she is trying to be, and was initially unfazed.<sup>74</sup> A final, crucial consideration here is the explicit hint at monstrosity in this extract: Medea *monstrabat* ('demonstrates', 7.253) that she has been affected by what has happened. This is an odd moment, as it might call into question why Venus feels the need to then utilise her powers of touch and call upon her usual powers as goddess of love to achieve her ends. Perhaps this should be read as Medea beginning to realise her own power on some level, with Valerius highlighting this using a verb which is etymologically connected to the word *monstra*. Not only that, Venus responds to this realisation, by increasing her potency and calling upon her tried and tested powers, augmenting her own surprisingly unsuccessful monstrous guise.

In considering Venus' interactions with Medea in Colchis, and comparing the reaction of the Lemnians to the monstrous intervention of the goddess there, it is clear that she has attempted to achieve a similar level of chaos in the maiden, but needs to alter her tactics in order to do so. Medea clearly presents a unique challenge, one which Venus has already tried to meet by coming to see Medea *ipsa*, 'herself'. Venus has employed monstrous behaviour on both occasions and where this was highly effective in Lemnos, Medea is almost unfazed. In Medea, Venus has clearly found a powerful woman who displays almost adversarial behaviour and a woman more than able to deal with the threat of monsters. Medea is a woman who can deal with the gods in a manner which other humans cannot manage; she is able to see through Venus-in-disguise and for a moment, see herself in that image. Medea displays here transgressive qualities, in that she is herself showing behaviour which is outside the bounds of what is expected. She is able to question the behaviour of Venus, which is transgressive in that the goddess has slipped free from her own

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<sup>74</sup> Soon, rather than Fury-like gods afflicting Medea, instead the Furies themselves will be involved: *propiorque implevit Erinys* ('and nearer the Fury fills her', 7.462). See Hershkowitz (1998b, 34) for more on Medea's 'madness', and these scenes 'foreshadowing... her role as a Fury to Jason'.

identity, displaying the traits of a monster, a creature which is itself hybrid in form. Being able to respond positively to such a challenge, even if only for a moment, reveals Medea to be a character who is able to take on such transgressions, and she shows that she has the potential to be transgressive in her own right in doing so.

Monsters have been seen to be a feature of this text from the very beginning, providing the motivation for the mission and a link to the Muse. Alcimedea, Jason's mother, has been seen to have links with her future daughter-in-law, two women who shall never meet but who share an interest in the occult and, initially at least on the part of Medea, in the welfare of Jason; furthermore, Venus' interaction with the Lemnians bears several close similarities with her intervention in Medea's ruminations at Colchis, similarities which link Medea once again with monsters. We shall see that Medea and monsters begin to become even more closely tied together through several more episodes in the text, including the stop at Cyzicus, and the dealings with 'real' monsters at Sigeum and Bebrycia, before Jason and the Argonauts arrive at their destination. Repeatedly, we see monsters being used in this text as markers for transgression, and as tools to explore this complex idea. The testing or outright collapse of boundaries in the Argonautic sphere is explored through monsters, and we are compelled to consider Medea's own transgressions both in the story as we have it and in the future, as we head inexorably towards her wedding on Peuce.

### 4.3 Cyzicus, the *noua signa* and the *noua monstra*

Before we move on to consider the Argonauts' encounters with 'real' monsters, it is necessary to pause and reflect on another episode in which figurative monsters are at play: the episode at the kingdom of the Doliones.<sup>75</sup> As in the Lemnian and Colchian episodes involving Venus, a female deity plays a leading role in this section of text too, and the need for revenge is once again at the heart of the episode. Revenge will of course be a major concern for Medea in her later life, as we find in earlier texts. During their short stay in this land, the Argonauts make friends with the inhabitants and their king Cyzicus. Unfortunately, due to the machinations of Cybele, the *Argo* ends up returning in error in the middle of the night and during the ensuing battle, the Argonauts unwittingly kill their erstwhile hosts. The collapse of boundaries in Valerius' world is once again explored through the use of monsters, here figurative in nature, and comparisons between this episodes and those involving monsters at both Lemnos and Colchis can be made.<sup>76</sup> Monsters are once again inextricably tied to transgression, and Valerius is keen to concatenate instances of transgression to create the direst of outcomes for the characters. Furthermore, a new and unexpected link in the chain of monstrous activities can be discerned, a chain which ultimately leads once again to Medea.

As the Argonauts leave Sigeum after defeating the monster,<sup>77</sup> the text makes it clear that a new geographical area is being penetrated on this pioneering journey.<sup>78</sup> The Argonauts are making the transition from Europe into Asia, and into unknown territory. As if to highlight the confusion the men feel as they enter uncharted waters,

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<sup>75</sup> On this episode see Manuwald (1999, especially 191-201) and Stover 2012 (113-48).

<sup>76</sup> Bernstein (2009, 54) also sees a link between the passages, reading both as a violation of *hospitium*.

<sup>77</sup> See below.

<sup>78</sup> As discussed in a paper entitled 'Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* and the exploration of the seas' by Gesine Manuwald, at the 2010 Celtic Conference in Classics, Edinburgh.



Valerius describes the landscape they face as *alium orbem* ‘another world’ (2.628).<sup>79</sup> The land ahead of them is so unfamiliar that it is *ceu fundo prolata maris* (‘as if it were cast up from the bottom of sea’, 2.630),<sup>80</sup> and it is just after this description that Cyzicus is introduced (2.635). At first he appears confused at the sight of the *Argo*, which is described as a *noua signa* (‘new sign’, 2.636), a perhaps not unexpected reaction given that the *Argo* is of course the first ship in existence. However this sea-going *monstrum* (Cat. 64.14-5)<sup>81</sup> is once again depicted as something portentous here, as Cyzicus not only looks at it in wonder (*miratur*, 2.638), but curiously in his opening address to the crew he begins to speak of *fama*, saying that the Argonauts are ‘*fama mihi maior*’, (‘greater to me than rumour’, 2.640).<sup>82</sup> In the discussion of the Lemnian episode above, we have seen the monstrous nature of the personified Fama and the havoc she can wreak (particularly when she works in cahoots with Venus, determined on vengeance), and although we may choose to read Cyzicus’ mention of *fama* with or without the capital letter, comparison of the ship to such a dangerous notion is foreboding.

As the *Argo* arrives in this new land, therefore, it is clear that Valerius has already begun to sow the seeds of transgression by highlighting the unfamiliar nature of the land in terms of an overturning of the natural order, and has the king refer to the *Argo* itself as being greater than a dire creature/process, rumour, which has already caused mass murder in a recent destination. Valerius continues to undermine

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<sup>79</sup> Spaltenstein (2002, ad loc.) points out that Apollonius (1.936f) goes into detail describing a variety of monsters (such as those with six arms) which live in this area, but then comments (1.950) that they do not affect Cyzicus. Valerius chooses not to mention these monsters, instead giving a description at the ‘other-worldliness’ of the area, and bringing into the foreground a different sort of figurative monster to directly affect the characters therein.

<sup>80</sup> This description calls to mind Lucan’s depiction of the Caesarian army being ‘shipwrecked and floating on the plain’ (*iam naufraga campo / Caesaris arma natant*, BC 4.87-8).

<sup>81</sup> See O’Hara (2007, 33-54) for a discussion of the inconsistency in the ‘first ship’ myth in Catullus 64.

<sup>82</sup> Spaltenstein (2002, 484-5) argues that *nova* (2.636) is not inconsistent with *fama* (2.640), as Cyzicus ‘expects to see the Argonauts’ – the ship’s fame has preceded it.

the stability of the scene as book 2 closes. Although the establishment of a friendly relationship between Cyzicus and Jason is not developed beyond a few lines, the details that Valerius does include are peculiar, and they overturn our long-held expectations about the nature of sea-faring in this text. As Cyzicus welcomes the Argonauts at a feast, he describes to Jason the scene on a goblet which depicts the threat to their harbour from their neighbours the Pelasgians (2.655.8).<sup>83</sup> Having already expressed wonder at the *noua signa* of the *Argo*, and given that the ship has the title of the first in history,<sup>84</sup> it is something of a surprise to discover by way of this ecphrasis that Cyzicus' domain is regularly under attack from a race with seafaring capabilities, and that their own land has a harbour.<sup>85</sup> In an era seemingly without nautical technology, it is difficult to imagine the Doliones conceiving of such a facility, never mind constructing it. Valerius overturns our expectations here by having Cyzicus and Jason share this conversation, and passes on without explanation. This first ship is patently *not* first after all, and our grounding is now unsure due to this inconsistency.<sup>86</sup> Once again, confusion is brought into the text. It is on this note that the book ends, and we are left to surmise without any further details that the Argonauts and Doliones forged a strong relationship by reading the opening of book 3.

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<sup>83</sup> See Poortvliet (1991, *ad loc.*).

<sup>84</sup> See chapter 6 for more on this.

<sup>85</sup> Spaltenstein (2002, 484-5) argues that Valerius did not take into account the primacy of the *Argo* here. See Armstrong (2009, 75) on Augustan responses to man-made marvels such as harbours as 'at once an admirable manifestation of the heights of human achievement, and exhibition of hubris'.

<sup>86</sup> This is similar to the intriguing and confused status of the *Argo* in Catullus 64, on which see for example Konstan (1977) and Feeney (2007, chapter 4 especially); see also O'Hara (2007) on this work and on inconsistency in Latin epic generally. Note also that earlier in book 2 Hypsipyle helps her father escape death at the women's hands on a sea-going vessel: *uisa ratis saeuae defecta laboribus undae, / quam Thetidi longinqua dies Glaucoque repostam / solibus et canis urebat luna pruinis*; (she spies a ship worn out with the toils of the savage sea, long ago offered up to Thetis and Glaucus, which days used to burn with their suns and the moon with her white frosts', 2.285-7). See Poortvliet (1991, *ad loc.*) on the Lemnian vessel as a 'raft' rather than a ship *per se*. See Malamud and McGuire (1993, 196) on the similarities between Catullus' and Valerius' handling of the first ship: 'By the time Valerius inherits it, the myth of the *Argo* has become a trope for the impossibility of discovering an origin; for Valerius it seems also to be a metaphor for the impossibility of creating a truly original text.'

As book 3 opens, we learn that the Argonauts have been in Cyzicus' kingdom for three days (3.1). As they leave, we begin to see that during their stay the Argonauts have become friendly with their hosts, as evidenced by Cyzicus' tears on their departure (*lacrimans*, 3.9) and the exchange of gifts (3.5-14). At the end of the scene, Valerius once again calls on the Muses for assistance to help him tell the remainder of the tale (3.15-19), another sign of the calamity to come.<sup>87</sup> Valerius describes what happens as *infanda* (3.15), but despite the 'unspeakable' nature of the episode, he will still go on to relate the story. We learn that the Argonauts and the Doliones have ended up fighting each other (3.17-19),<sup>88</sup> and the seriousness and unpleasantness of the episode which follows is further marked by the delayed mention of the involvement of *Erinys*, ('the Fury', 3.19).<sup>89</sup> However before we learn the full details of this disastrous turn of events, the narrator once again fills in Cyzicus' back story, as he did with the Lemnian women. It is here that the Fury hinted at in 3.19 becomes an explicit *monstrum*, and here that the transgressive nature of this section of the story and the involvement of the Argonauts is laid bare.

The narrator explains that Cyzicus is a man who has recently carried out actions which ultimately lead to his own destruction. Cyzicus has lost control during a hunt, *ingenti praedae deceptus amore*, ('betrayed by huge love of prey', 3.22), and has incurred the wrath of the goddess Cybele by killing her sacred lion (3.20-31).<sup>90</sup> Not only that, but he has displayed the mane and head of the beast on his doorpost (3.24-5). It is not clear whether this incident occurred immediately prior to the Argonauts' arrival or whether he undertook his hunt as they left; however the

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<sup>87</sup> Spaltenstein (2004, 10).

<sup>88</sup> See Dinter (2009) on the epigrammatic poetics of the battle.

<sup>89</sup> Spaltenstein (2004, 11).

<sup>90</sup> Cybele, a 'mother god', is often depicted as being borne through Phrygia on a chariot drawn by lions: Lucretius *DRN* 2.601 and Catullus 63.76 (the poem immediately preceding the famous *Argo*-related epyllion). See Fowler (2002, 156) and Spaltenstein (2004, ad loc.).

ramifications of his actions come to bear on the Argonauts. Cybele decides that a punishment is in order; however her actions are not as clear cut as we might imagine. Cybele enacts her plans in an unexpected way, and in doing so brings monsters into the plot:

*quae postquam Haemoniam tantae non inmemor irae*<sup>91</sup>  
*aerisono de monte ratem praefixaque regum*  
*scuta uidet, noua **monstra** uiro, noua funera uoluit,*  
*ut socias in nocte manus utque impia bella*  
*conserat et saeuis erroribus implicet urbem.*

(‘but she, not forgetful of her great anger, sees from the cymbal-clashing mountain the ship with its shield-border of kings, and devises new monsters and new deaths for the hero, to set allied hands against each other in the night, to bring about impious war, to enmesh the city in savage errors’, 3.27-31).

The punishment she enacts begins by closely resembling a truncated account of the death of Palinurus (*Aeneid* 5): the *Argo* is turned back in error, since Tiphys has fallen asleep and loses control of the tiller (3.31-42).<sup>92</sup>

Before examining the phrase *noua monstra* in detail, it is important to establish the outcome of Cybele’s anger. The Doliones believe that their harbour is

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<sup>91</sup> Spaltenstein (2004, ad loc.) relates this to *Aen.* 1.4: *saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram*.

<sup>92</sup> See Spaltenstein (2004, ad loc.) for discussion of the parallels between this episode and the loss of Palinurus (*Aen.* 5.835-71); see Nelis (2001, 221-3) on the links between Palinurus’ death and the Apollonian Tiphys.

under attack from the Pelasgians (3.435), and a narrative follows which describes the god Pan's involvement in calling the Doliones to war. The actions he takes and his descriptions bear similarities to the role of Fama during the Lemnian episode (3.46-57). He too is described as working in cahoots with a goddess, here Cybele (3.47), described as *saeuissima*. Pan's voice is 'louder than all the war trumpets' (*uox omnes super una tubas*, 3.51), a description which calls to mind other characters in the epic connected with monsters; for example: Alcimedea the necromancer, whose shrieking laments as Jason embarks are louder than those of all the other mothers (1.317-9); the Lemnian women, whom Venus-the-monster makes scream 'louder than the familiar wife' (2.225-8);<sup>93</sup> and later, Hercules the monster-slayer, whose crying for Hylas is louder than 'all nature' (4.20-1).<sup>94</sup> Not even Mars (*Martia*, 3.53) or the Furies (*Eumenidum*, 3.54) are able to call off the Doliones once they are at the mercy of Pan; here it seems that the Furies might not be as powerful as this god, but then Bellona herself appears to Cyzicus (3.60-4), and he follows her along, swept up in the situation. Meanwhile, the Argonauts believe they have arrived in Colchis, and begin to fight 'struck by doubt and fear', (*anceps fixit pauor*, 3.74).

Features such as the feminine deity working in cahoots with a more earthly creature, revenge, mistaken or impious bloodshed clearly connect this episode with the Lemnian calamity. However a particularly confusing aspect of Cybele's anger is her wish to bring monsters 'to the man', *uiro* (3.29). Interpretation of what is going on in this scene is difficult, a circumstance which neatly fits the amorphousness of monsters themselves. The word *uiro* could be referring to Cyzicus; however it is difficult to see, in the battle which ensues, how monsters might be affecting him. It is

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<sup>93</sup> The Lemnian men cover their eyes at this point *uelut agmina cernant / Eumenidum ferrumue super Bellona coruscet* ('as though they saw the ranks of the Eumenides, or Bellona flashed her sword above them', 2.227-8). See Spaltenstein (2004, 22-3) for discussion of the Gorgon-like nature of the Eumenides, as mentioned at 3.54.

<sup>94</sup> See above for more on these issues.

true that the king dies at Jason's hands, but the people left behind to suffer the aftermath of the *Argo*'s turning back arguably suffer more than Cyzicus himself, in that death is instantaneous, but the grief and horror of what has occurred is damaging and long-lasting. Mozley has translated *uiro* as 'hero', an interpretation which brings about inevitable comparisons to *Aeneid* 1.1;<sup>95</sup> if this interpretation is correct, Cybele actually appears to be attacking Jason, who is the *uir* of this poem.<sup>96</sup> The major puzzle about this interpretation is that thus far, Jason has played a minimal part in Cyzicus' story and certainly does not appear to accompany Cyzicus on the hunt in question, so it seems odd that in wreaking her vengeance for the loss of her sacred animal, Cybele would devise 'new monsters' for Jason.<sup>97</sup> Curiously, it is only when Cybele spies the *Argo* that the full plan of her vengeance is crystallised, despite the fact that Cyzicus appears to have acted alone. It could be that Cybele wishes to capitalise on the new-found friendship between Jason and the king to cause maximum damage, but it is the survivors of the battle who will suffer the most, rather than Cyzicus.<sup>98</sup> In reacting to Cyzicus, Jason has somehow been punished, and the ambiguity in the text highlights the confusion which this choice, all connected to transgression, engenders.

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<sup>95</sup> See Fowler (2000, 123) on the word *arma* as always being 'significantly intertextual with the opening of the *Aeneid*' in post-Augustan literature, 'despite the fact that it occurs in the *PHI* corpus of texts nearly 3000 times'. Spaltenstein (2004, 14) believes this to relate to Cyzicus, therefore disagreeing with Liberman's translation.

<sup>96</sup> Later, as the Argonauts' grief is described, they are called *viri: bis Zephyri iam uela uocant, fiducia maestis / nulla uiris* ('Twice already the Zephyrs call the sails, but with the heroes in grief there is no assurance.' 3.365).

<sup>97</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, 174) who compares the Cyzicus scenes in Apollonius and concludes that 'the devaluation of Cyzicus complements and reinforces the recuperation of Jason'. There could be a hint of meta-poetics in *noua monstra*: this version of the Cyzicus episode is different to the one presented by Apollonius.

<sup>98</sup> See Collard (1975, 131–51 and 146–57), Nelis (2001, 141–4), and Lowe (forthcoming, ii) on the vengeful Fury-like behaviour of Dido and Apollonius' Medea, and on Valerius' '[doubling] the heroine-as-Fury trope of Apollonius' fourth book and Virgil's fourth book in his own eighth book. At loosely corresponding line numbers (385–96), the Argonauts call Jason's infatuation with Medea *Furiae* (390) and Medea herself an *Erinyes* (396).'

It is clear that Cyzicus is a transgressor, in that he has killed and flaunted the death of a sacred animal; he therefore plays a part in his own destruction.<sup>99</sup> What is less clear is whether he was aware of his actions. It has been suggested that Cyzicus is something of a *contemptor diuum*,<sup>100</sup> and is therefore a human manifestation of such monstrous creatures as Amycus. Cyzicus is also directly compared to Coeus, a Titan who was one of the archetypal *contemptores diuum* (3.224-8), however the extent of Cyzicus' intentions are not clear. It has been pointed out that in a belated tale such as this, such horrors can hardly be unheard of; Cyzicus' behaviour is in fact reminiscent not only of Mezentius fixing the heads of his victims to doors (*Aen.* 8.196-7),<sup>101</sup> but also to Turnus' treatment of Nisus and Euryalus (*Aen.* 9.471-2).<sup>102</sup> However there is no doubt that Cybele's wish to bring *noua monstra*, 'monsters unheard of', combined with the punishment of Jason, once again turns our expectation on its head.

The sunrise reveals to the Argonauts the horror of their mistake. This is especially poignant since the previous sunrise to be narrated brought their departure from Cyzicus and his people (3.1-14). In the sunrise imagery there may also be a final reminder of the power of the female deity at work in this scene: as Agave

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<sup>99</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 174).

<sup>100</sup> 'The Argonauts usually fight human beings who behave like monsters. On their arrival at the Doliones' shores, the reference to the Earthborn Giants is replaced by the reference Cyzicus makes to his nation's human adversaries, whom he describes as 'savage races' (*saeuas... gentes*, 2.644), while claiming that only in his land will the Argonauts find civilised men (2.646-8), but as the Argonauts' battle with the Doliones which follows at the start of book 3 reveals that Cyzicus, in his ferocity and contempt for the divine, is himself a human monster' (Hershkowitz 1998b, 203). In his review of this work (<http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/1999/1999-07-20.html>, accessed 14<sup>th</sup> August 2012), Kleywegt comments 'certainly calling him 'a human monster' (203) goes way too far.'

<sup>101</sup> On Mezentius, Virgil continues: *huic monstro Volcanus erat pater* ('Vulcan was the father to this monster', *Aen.* 8.198).

<sup>102</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 172). There are also surely connections with Dido and Hypsipyle in Cyzicus too; for example, Summers (1894, 30) connects Cyzicus' first speech (2.641-3 in particular) with Dido's first speech to the Trojans (*Aen.* 1.562-78); his wife Clite laments that she is not expecting a child and therefore has no solace in a baby of his (3.316-9), a moment which has clear echoes of Dido's words at *Aen.* 4.327-30. The description of Cyzicus' funeral pyre and the gifts left by Jason for him also resonates with the description of the Carthaginian queen's own pyre (3.337-44; *Aen.* 4.504-9).

regains her sanity in the *Bacchae*, her recognition of her fatal error is described in terms of a sunrise (*Bacch.* 1267, 1269-70).<sup>103</sup> Once again we are reminded of the role of monsters in this scene, with Tiphys himself being able to see them:

*ecce autem primos iam spargere lumine portus  
orta dies notaeque (nefas) albescere turre.*  
*‘di maris,’ attonito conclamat ab agmine Tiphys  
‘ut mea **fatali** damnastis pectora somno.  
heu socii quantis conplerunt litora **monstris!**’*

(‘Look! The dawn began to scatter its first faint beams across the harbour, and the familiar towers whitened (horror!). “Gods of the sea”, exclaimed Tiphys from the astonished ranks, “how you have damned my heart to a deadly sleep! Alas the allies fill the shores with such monsters!”’ 3.257-61).<sup>104</sup>

Tiphys can only see what has happened once the sun rises, and in his words *fatali* and *monstris*, there are shades of Horace’s description of Cleopatra at *Carm.* 1.37. The debate continues as to what Horace might have meant by those words,<sup>105</sup> and Mozley translates this Argonautic line as ‘Alas for my comrades’ fears that fill the shore’. Again the multiplicity of possibilities of interpretation maps neatly onto the

<sup>103</sup> For Hershkowitz (1998a, 39-40), this use of female imagery applied to males ‘contributes to a destabilization of epic norms, in which masculinity and heroism are closely linked’. She argues that whilst in the land of the Doliones, the Argonauts ‘were behaving like irrational women, not irrational men, like Maenads in tragedy, not heroes in epic’. Once again, gender transgression becomes an issue. The Bacchic imagery continues (3.263-6), on which see Fitch (1976, 117).

<sup>104</sup> See Spaltenstein (2004, 87) on the nature of the monsters here; he resolves that they refer to *cadaueribus* and ‘crimes inouïs’.

<sup>105</sup> See above.



confusion facing the Argonauts as the sun reveals that they were in fact never in Colchis, but have instead slaughtered the friends who had welcomed them only a short time ago in the kingdom of Cyzicus. Such grief comes to bear on the Argonauts that they find it impossible to leave; it is difficult to see how the monsters are truly affecting Cyzicus as the *uir* targeted by Cybele.<sup>106</sup>

The question to arise from these scenes might be: who or what are the monsters at work here? Cybele may have constructed *noua monstra* for the Argonauts, yet they are recognisable to the helmsman Tiphys. The god who helps create this situation, Pan, bears resemblances to the Furies involved with Venus on Lemnos, and Bellona herself also becomes involved. Cyzicus has acted in a transgressive way by killing Cybele's sacred animal, but her response to this outrage is to prompt the Argonauts to continue to act in a transgressive way, much as Venus punished transgression with transgression in Lemnos. The *Argo* is enmeshed within this web of repeated indignation, as the narrator soon explains; for once the bloodshed has ended, we discover that this fate has been attached to Cyzicus and his people since idea of the *Argo* was conceived:

*scilicet haec illo iuuenem populosque manebant  
tempore, Peliacis caderet cum montibus arbor:  
hoc uolucrumque minae praesagaque fulmina longo  
acta mari tulerant. sed quis non **prima** refellat  
**monstra** deum longosque sibi non auguret annos?*

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<sup>106</sup> Hershkowitz (1998a, 22-3) sees the Argonauts' grief as a form of madness.

(‘it is certain that this circumstance was awaiting the young man and the people since the tree fell on the Pelian mountain; this outcome the threats of birds and presaging thunderbolts borne far overseas had brought. But who would not refute gods’ first omens nor augur for himself a long lifespan?’ 3.352-6).

At this crucial moment we are once again reminded of the primacy of the *Argo*, despite the fact that this was somewhat undermined at the outset of the Cyzicus episode, during the ecphrastic description of the wine cup.<sup>107</sup> Not only that, but there is also present an explicit connection between monsters and gods. Again interpretative difficulties abound here, unsurprising in a boundary-free world, where transgression is the order of the day. It is not easy to interpret *monstra* here,<sup>108</sup> and perhaps here the word should be translated in its religious sense rather than its monstrous sense. Nonetheless, the link between monsters and the gods is intriguing and enduring: we have already seen the close connections between Venus and Fama, a monster and a goddess, and here in the Doliones’ kingdom we have seen another female deity wreak havoc on a nation in revenge for a transgression using an earthly

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<sup>107</sup> See Spaltenstein (2004, ad loc.).

<sup>108</sup> The final references to monsters in book 3 are those to which Hercules has been linked during his Labours; these appearances of *monstra* are much more easily discernible as monsters because of this link to the famous monster-slayer. For example, Juno’s rage over Hercules’ involvement is once more incited and she complains: *Phrygiis ultro concurrere monstis / nempe uirum et pulchro reserantem Pergama coepto / uidimus* (‘Without doubt, we have seen the man engage for his part with Phrygian monsters and in a beauteous enterprise set Pergamum free’ 3.512-4); Hercules stretches out on the hide of the *fului monstra* (‘the tawny monster’, 3.567); and Jason laments the missing Hercules and his stories of *durae ... monstra nouercae* (‘his harsh stepmother’s monsters, 3.610). The final reference to *monstra* in book 3 is once again to *noua monstra* (3.665); Meleager suggests that perhaps new monsters are challenging Hercules, and that is why he is not to be found. In the other references to monsters which we have seen, for example where Venus, Fama, Cybele and Pan are concerned, things are not so clear cut. In these examples, we have begun to see links between the mixing of masculine and feminine gender roles, the vengeance of female deities, and the involvement of monsters in sections of text which feature them in a surprising and/or figurative way.

god compared to the Furies, and in which even the actors themselves (such as Tiphys) can see monsters.

One conclusion might be that Jason and his men are the monsters, carrying out a heinous act of murder upon men they had recently called their allies; but the dividing lines between good and evil begin to blur, as we might expect. Jason has already been sanctioned by Jupiter when he declared that the seas should be opened to allow the *Argo* to progress (1.556-8);<sup>109</sup> therefore there is a sense of inevitability in the demise of Cyzicus, not least since this fate was set in motion when the *Argo* was constructed. Not only is this first ship called a *monstrum* by Catullus; here we find that monsters also have a surprising role to play at the heart of this situation. The confusing status of the journey, i.e. first but fundamentally wrong, opening up the world but introducing war and other afflictions to humanity, is brought into the foreground once again. Now not only is the ship the monster, the men taking the journey are also monsters, as are the people they meet and the gods who punish them. There are also striking similarities here with the Lemnian episode, where we are told the story of the demise of the Lemnian men at the prompting of Venus the monster, incidents which all occurred while the Argonauts were not present. The Argonauts were not present to see Cyzicus' own transgressions. A female deity's need for revenge have also played destructive part in the Doliones' history, with the various strands of transgression converging as book 3 begins. What we find is that Jason is in fact the unexpected (and perhaps unjustified?) bringer of divine justice in this episode – in returning to the land of the Doliones in error, he punishes the transgressor Cyzicus just as his own transgressions (the reneging of his wedding vows) will lead ultimately to his own dire punishment, brought about by the mother

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<sup>109</sup> See chapter 6.

of his own children. Familiar tenets are not available once again in this episode: there is nothing concrete to which either we as readers or the characters can cling. Words lose their meaning, good and evil is confused, expected roles begin to switch, and monsters oversee it all. The intervention of females displaying male behaviour, and the idea of revenge, become even more firmly rooted in this version of the Argonautic myth as the *Argo* progresses, and will ultimately hint toward Medea. The seeds of these notions have been sown not only during the Lemnian and Colchian episodes involving Venus bearing monstrous disguises, but also with Cyzicus.

## 5: The monstrous and the ocular

In our examination of the transgressive, real monsters also accompany those figurative ones which have served to confound our expectations so far. Aside from the Harpies,<sup>1</sup> Jason and the Argonauts also famously face a number of other creatures that are outside the bounds of usual expectation or behaviour, and who differ from humans greatly. Jason does not himself face any of the monsters that the crew encounter prior to their arrival in Colchis: Hercules kills the creature at Sigeum, and Pollux defeats Amycus.<sup>2</sup> However, as we shall see, these creatures have surprising links to Medea, the woman with whom Jason will face and defeat no fewer than three sets of monstrous creatures once in Colchis (the fire-breathing bulls, the earth-born men and the serpent guardian of the Fleece – all of whom he defeats with Medea's help). When we focus closely on the details which Valerius gives in connection with both the monster at Sigeum and with Amycus, and compare these to Medea, we see that in fact the three share a common characteristic – they each have distinctive eyes.<sup>3</sup> These creatures are in fact forerunners for her, as she will herself go on to exhibit the transgressive behaviour we would expect of a monster.

A further exploration in this section will involve the link between Medea and the Muses. We find that a further transgression takes place in connection with Medea, in that she fulfils the role of human-Muse in this work, a feature which reflects some earlier representations of her. If this is so, then she is once again depicted as something of a hybrid creature, sharing qualities of the divine and mortal,

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 4 for an explanation of the omission of the Harpies as a point of interest for this study.

<sup>2</sup> Calais and Zetes outwit the Harpies.

<sup>3</sup> As part of her wider examination of eyes and their connections to fascination, stupefaction, and the monstrous, Barton (1993, 94) discusses the 'paradox of heightened power and heightened vulnerability that made the eye especially fascinating' for the Romans. See also Bartsch (2006) for more on ocular theory, and Lovatt (forthcoming) on 'the assaultive gaze'.

and all of the dangers of such an entity. In this role, she is even perhaps able to transcend the poem itself, and affect its path. Certainly this link puts Medea outside the expectations of usual human behaviour. The Muses describe themselves in their famous self-classifying account in Hesiod's *Theogony* 27-8<sup>4</sup> as creatures that can spread truth as well as lies. Fama can also do this, and in the *Aeneid* (4.178-85) she (for Fama is personified as a female) is a creature of bird-like features, with an eye and a mouth under every feather – something of a monstrous appearance in itself.<sup>5</sup> This all-seeing ability gives Fama special privilege over the world, and highlights the importance, but also perhaps the problems, of being able to see everything, all at once. Medea's status as usurper of the Muse therefore makes her a monster, with the cooperation between Fama and Venus, and the significance of eyes and vision earlier in the text, strengthening this association. Medea will then go on to marry in a cave, the traditional home of monsters, and a cave with a troubling past. The behaviour exhibited by monsters in this poem will be seen to be part of a build-up to Medea's monstrous future, a future which ultimately begins on Peuce, with all of its transgressive connotations.

### 5.1 Sigeum<sup>6</sup>

The first encounter with a 'real' monster takes place at Sigeum in the Troad (2.451-578). Given that Pelias sends Jason on the quest because there are no monsters in at

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<sup>4</sup> Spentzou (2002a, 1-10).

<sup>5</sup> Lowe (forthcoming). On *Fama*, see Hardie (2009 and 2012, where *Fama*'s 'chaotic amorphousness' is discussed) and Lowe on *Fama*'s metapoetic, transgressive and monstrous nature, as gleaned from her depiction in the *Aeneid*: 'The result [of Virgil's description] is a hybrid body which remains so indistinct that we cannot be sure whether it is humanoid, birdlike, or metamorphic. Thanks to the very explicitness of Virgil's description, *Fama* is effectively amorphous'.

<sup>6</sup> On this, see Stadler (1991).

home for him to face (and hopefully be defeated by), for Hercules has already killed them all (1.33-7), it is somewhat surprising when the Argonauts suddenly face a monster early on. Valerius opens the episode by utilising a transgressive marker to remind us of the primacy of the quest, by saying *Thessala Dardiniis tunc primum puppis harenis | adpulit* ('Then for the first time a Thessalian ship touched Dardanian shores', 2.445-6).<sup>7</sup> Having a great deal of experience in dispatching monsters, Hercules steps up and defeats this one too, rescuing a damsel in distress, Hesione, in the process.<sup>8</sup> Hesione's father Laomedon reluctantly offers Hercules some horses as a reward (2.550-66), but Laomedon actually wishes to kill Hercules (2.567-71) to cancel out a prophecy which tells of Hercules' destroying Troy. Hercules defers the offer until after the mission (2.574-6), and thus avoids any imminent danger.<sup>9</sup>

It has been recognised that the scene in Sigeum has an important Ovidian intertext, sharing qualities with Ovid's description of Perseus' rescue of Andromeda, at *Met.* 4.663-752.<sup>10</sup> Perseus and Hercules are of course relatives, and the way that this scene so closely maps onto the earlier story might remind us of Jason's wishes for Perseus' winged sandals at 1.67-9, when he is first given the quest to carry out. It could be said that when he evokes this myth, on some level Jason is himself wishing for monsters, given the fact that the culmination of Perseus' story involves the defeat of a monster. However Hercules will face *this* monster, despite Pelias' mistaken

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<sup>7</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 194) argues that here Valerius signals the deviation from earlier accounts of this episode.

<sup>8</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 229-30) sees this episode as a 'dangerous digression, as it sets in motion a series of events unprecedented in the Argonautic saga and with the potential to displace Jason and the Argonauts from their own epic.'

<sup>9</sup> Later, after losing Hylas, Hercules is about to return to Troy to claim his prize (4.58-9) when Apollo steps in and requests that Hercules be sent to the Caucasus to release Prometheus instead (4.60-81), thus avoiding another 'dangerous digression' from the Argonautic mission. On Valerius and the Trojan war, see Barnes (1981). On Hercules, Hylas and the gaze, see Malamud and McGuire (1993). On Prometheus' release, see Hershkowitz (1998b, 197). On the fall of Troy as 'an instant of rupture', see Feeney (2007, 117-8).

<sup>10</sup> See Poortvliet (1991, 240-1 plus bibliography) on these lines. Hershkowitz (1998b, 73-8) discusses the intertexts between this episode and Manilius' Andromeda episode at *Astronomica* 5.538-618, the sea monster in Seneca's *Phaedra* (1019-48), and the sea-snakes which kill Laocoon at *Aen.* 2.203-22.

belief that he had already rid Greece of all such threats. The narrator makes it clear that the Argonauts have not crossed into the ‘new world’ until *after* the ship has departed from Sigeum (2.628). In this sense, Sigeum is arguably part of a familiar world, and as such it is puzzling as to why Pelias makes his early claim about monsters; perhaps he was thinking only of Hercules’ famous labours when he proclaimed that there were no monsters left in Greece.<sup>11</sup> Pelias may be unaware of or may have forgotten about the monster at Sigeum, or perhaps he does not consider this creature to be suitable for the task of killing Jason; a further consideration might be that this is another example of Pelias’ lack of understanding in this regard.<sup>12</sup> There is no mention in the text of Jason even being considered to face this creature, which is logical given the presence of the great monster-slayer Hercules. Ensuring that Hercules faces this monster excuses Jason, who is conspicuously absent in this episode, from doing so; importantly, this delays the inevitable, in that Jason will face his own monsters later.<sup>13</sup>

As the Valerian sea-monster appears, it is described emphatically as a monster and a beast: *ecce repens consurgere ponto / belua*<sup>14</sup>, ***monstrum*** *ingens*; (‘Look! Unexpectedly rising from the sea a beast, a huge monster’, 2.478-9), and initially Hercules is fearful of the creature and its ‘vast coils’ (*spatiosa uolumina monstri*, 2.514). This description lends the monster a serpent-like quality, and we should keep this image in mind when Jason finally meets the guardian of the Fleece, later in the text. Hercules deftly dispatches the sea monster and frees the princess trapped by it. It is in this first monster narrative that we begin to see an intriguing

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<sup>11</sup> See Zissos (2008, 104) on the temporal implications of the adverb *olim*, (1.35) and comparison to AR. For more on VF’s ‘innovative chronology’, see Adamietz (1970, 34); Gärtner (1994, 66); and Spaltenstein (2002, ad loc.).

<sup>12</sup> See above.

<sup>13</sup> The only ‘monster’ Jason is unable to defeat is one which he faces alone: Medea.

<sup>14</sup> See Felton (2012, 115) on Hercules’ Labours becoming more monstrous as he moved further from the Peloponnese, and thus away from ‘civilisation’.



and repeated trope: that of the significance of eyes and appearance when in connection with monsters. As Hercules addresses her, Valerius makes a point of highlighting that Hesione modestly casts her eyes downward (2.471), and Hercules relishes the audience watching his exploits.<sup>15</sup> The description of the monster's eyes is also important, for as it looms into view, we are told that it is a creature 'whose glittering eyes flicker under a grey film', (*cuius stellantia glauca / lumina nube tremunt*, 2.499-500). The detailed description of the monster's eyes is striking. Where monsters are concerned, eyes and appearances become increasingly important. Crucially, in later life Medea and Jason become concerned with their own appearances to others as their relationship breaks down, and the themes of vision and eyes will come to further prominence as we examine more instances of monsters and monstrosity in the text.

## 5.2 Bebrycia

The Argonauts face the second 'real' monster of their quest in book 4. They arrive in Bebrycia, and soon discover that the ruler of the region, Amycus,<sup>16</sup> is a terrifying creature with many monstrous qualities. Amycus also appears in Theocritus' *Idyll* 22 and Apollonius' *Argonautica* 2 (particularly 2.1-163), but Valerius' version of events contains several innovations.<sup>17</sup> The scenes involving Amycus are rich in intertextual references and interpretative possibilities,<sup>18</sup> and in Bebrycia, Pollux (son of Jupiter)

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<sup>15</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 73 n.143); notice that Amata also has her eyes downcast (*causa mali tanti, oculos deiecta decoros*, *Aen.* 11.480).

<sup>16</sup> See Korn (1989); Hershkowitz (1998b, 78-91); Zissos (2003); Spaltenstein (2004, ad. loc.); Lovatt (2005, 143-5 and 149-54); Murgatroyd (2008, 382-6 and 2009, ad loc.).

<sup>17</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, 81-91); Zissos (2003, 661-2); Murgatroyd (2009, 76f).

<sup>18</sup> Interpretations of the passage are numerous; see Murgatroyd (2009, 76) for a survey of some.

will be involved in a fight to the death with a son of Neptune, Amycus, in a battle with gigantomachic overtones.<sup>19</sup>

As the Argonauts arrive in Bebrycia, the first simile to be ascribed to the Bebrycians relates them to the Cyclopes (4.104-9).<sup>20</sup> We learn that their king Amycus lives in a cave, and a simile links this once again to the Cyclopes (4.104): *quales Aetnaeis rabidi Cyclopes in antris*, ('just as the mad Cyclopes in Etna's caves [...]'). Amycus' cave-home is not only huge and cavernous (*spelunca ingens*),<sup>21</sup> but is also in a dramatic and evocative liminal location associated with transgression, *in extremo litore* ('on the edge of the shore').<sup>22</sup> Amycus regularly sacrifices humans to his father Neptune (4.109-11), or if the men are of a suitable build, he amuses himself by firstly challenging them to a deadly boxing match, in which he is obviously undefeated (4.111-14). Amycus then decorates his cave home with the remains of the men, and torn limbs and severed heads are strewn around.<sup>23</sup>

The hints already given regarding Amycus' monstrosity are soon underpinned by other characters' descriptions of him. As the *Argo* approaches Bebrycia, Amycus' father Neptune looks down in despair at the events as they unfold (4.114-30). The Cyclopean references continue to build, when in a scene reminiscent of Achaemenides' frightened pleas to Aeneas and the Trojans for help in escaping Polyphemus (*Aen.* 3.616-8),<sup>24</sup> the Argonaut Echion comes across a man who issues a

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<sup>19</sup> Hardie (1993, 83-5).

<sup>20</sup> See Bettenworth (2003) on Valerius' reception of earlier Amycus episodes and Homer's Polyphemus. Note that once the fighting is over, the Bebrycians are quick to distance themselves from the defeated king. See Zissos (2003, 622) on the ideological charge here.

<sup>21</sup> See Ov. *Fast.* 1.555 on Cacus for *spelunca ingens*. Murgatroyd (2008, 383) discusses the emphatic position of *ingens* in 4.177, and Felton (2012, 105) on the 'climate and topography' of monsters.

<sup>22</sup> Murgatroyd (2008, 383).

<sup>23</sup> Summers (1894) compares 4.99 to *Aen.* 7.10, as the Trojans avoid Circe's island: *proxima Circaeae raduntur litora terrae*; Shelton (1984, 20) foregrounds the lack of identity highlighted at 4.184-5: *nulla / iam facies nec nomen erat*. Murgatroyd (2008, 385) analyses the cave and its meta-literary function. Hershkowitz (1998b, 81) discusses the connections between Amycus, Mezentius and Turnus; Murgatroyd (2008, 385 and 2009, 78) makes further comparisons with Polyphemus, and links Amycus to Turnus and Dido (Murgatroyd 2009, 90).

<sup>24</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 78-9, 83).

dire warning about what the Argonauts will soon face: *'heu fuge', ait 'certo, quicumque es, perditte, passu | dum datur'* ("Flee while you can" he said, "whoever you are, doomed man!") 4.140-1). Despite the lack of knowledge regarding this man's identity,<sup>25</sup> Echion brings him back to the *Argo*, and his description of Amycus immediately alerts us to the fact that the king is no usual man: *'iam ueniet diros Amycus qui tollere caestus | imperet <et> uasto qui uertice nubile pulset'* ("soon Amycus will come, who will order you to raise the dreaded boxing gloves and strikes the clouds with the top of his monstrous head" 4.148-9). This image singles out Amycus as being gigantic – a man able to touch the sky he is so tall. Later, Amycus is once more figured as a Giant as he approaches and is described as *saeuus gigans* at 4.200; later, we are told that *mortalia nusquam | signa manent*, ('no mortal signs remain', 4.201-2), and Amycus is compared to Typhoeus (4.236-8), a major character in the Gigantomachic legend.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that the Giants who fought in the Gigantomachy<sup>27</sup> were monstrous has already been hinted at by Valerius early on in this version of the myth. As the Argonauts look back to the landscape they are leaving behind, they interpret what they see as a representation of this famously transgressive event:<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Shelton (1984, 19) on identity in these scenes. Rimell (2006) studies Medusa, who is robbed of her identity following her rape at the hands of Neptune (*Met.* 798-801) and turned into a creature with snaky hair; she is subsequently able to rob others of their identity by turning them into stone when they gaze at her (see also Barton (1993, 88) who discusses the dangers of fascination in connection with Medusa, and 'Medusa and Monumentality' in Lovatt (forthcoming)). Peuce arguably lost her identity when she was raped by the Hister; see chapter 1.

<sup>26</sup> Apollodorus (1.6.3) describes Typhon (or Typhoeus) as a monstrous hybrid.

<sup>27</sup> On the Gigantomachy, see for example Hor. *Carm.* 3.4.42-80, Ovid's *Met.* 1.1511-62; *Am.* 2.1.11f; Martial 11.52.17f; Apollod. 1.6.1f. On this episode in the Valerius, see Feeney (1991, 332-4 and 382), Hardie (1993, 83-7), Hardie (1986, index s.v. 'Gigantomachy'), and Adamietz (1976, 21 and n. 52). See Felton (2012, 110-11) for the Gigantomachy and Titanomachy as anthropomorphic vs. monstrous in Greek art, and the monstrous offspring of the Titans.

<sup>28</sup> See also Feeney (1991, 332-4 and 382), Hardie (1993, 83-7) and Adamietz (1976, 21 and n. 52).

*metus ecce deum damnataque bello*

*Pallene circumque uident inmania monstra*<sup>29</sup>

*terrigenum caelo quondam aduersata Gigantum*

*quos scopulis trabibusque parens miserata iugisque*

*induit et uersos exstruxit in aethera montes.*

(‘Look, Pallene, fear of the gods and their fated battleground: they see all around the huge monsters born of the Earth, that once opposed heaven, the Giants, whom in pity their mother joined them, dressed with rocks as roofs, and heaped up changed mountains into the firmament’, 2.16-20).

That the Argonauts see the Giants in the landscape even as they set out on their quest is telling, and it highlights the transgressive nature of their undertaking.<sup>30</sup> The Gigantomachic imagery at play at the outset of the journey is both fitting and significant as a representation of the punishment which awaits those who attempt to usurp the rightful order. It has been suggested that the *Argo* itself is a *contemptor diuum*,<sup>31</sup> a challenger of the gods; thus this scene is fitting. Amycus, a Gigantomachic creature, is also a *contemptor diuum*,<sup>32</sup> as he demonstrates when he boasts that *aliis rex Iuppiter oris* (‘Jupiter is king on other coasts’, 4.219). Rather

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<sup>29</sup> Poortvliet (1991, ad loc.) points out that the phrase can be found at *Aen.* 3.583-4 and *Fast.* 5.35-6, both in connection with Gigantomachic themes (note also that Drepanum in Sicily is the location in which Anchises dies, and the narration of this event occurs shortly after this Gigantomachic encounter; see chapter 1.2). See also Seneca, *Suas.* 1.15.

<sup>30</sup> See Poortvliet (1991, ad loc.) and Hershkowitz (1998b, 216-17).

<sup>31</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 217); see above on Cyzicus as the same. Horace (*Carm.* 1.3.18) describes the first ship, and the *monstra natantia* (‘sea-born monsters’) which may kill men but which man could not have conceived prior to the invention of sea travel (Nisbet and Hubbard (1970, ad loc.), Feeney (2007, 121-2). As if by way of reflecting the monstrous nature of the *Argo* to which Catullus makes reference (see above), and the monsters which live at sea as noted by Horace, here the Argonauts see in the vista before them the giants who assailed heaven, clothed as features of the landscape.

<sup>32</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 83-5).

than seeing the frightening image of the Gigantomachic challengers fossilised into the landscape, now the Argonauts physically face a monstrous embodiment of that challenge. The maritime-transgressors have met another transgressor, and it is the unnamed man who gives the first explicit reference to the king's monstrous nature:

*'namque isti frustra quisquam concurrere **monstro**  
audeat'*

(“for in vain would anyone dare to engage with that monster”, 4.155-6).

There are further clear indications of Amycus' monstrosity, and importantly, the significance of eyes begins to be seen again, as they were in the Sigeum episode. Although there is nothing in the text to indicate that Amycus has a single eye, repeated references to the Cyclopes naturally urge us to consider Amycus' appearance and especially his eyes. The fact that Amycus and Polyphemus are both sons of Neptune also brings the two closer in association.<sup>33</sup> This is underpinned when we learn that an unfortunate previous opponent of the king called Otreus had his eyes dashed out by the monster (*sed **prima** procul uixdum ora leuantis / fulminea frontem dextra disiectaue fudit / **lumina***, 4.166-8), with attention being drawn to the eyes by way of the enjambment of the word *lumina*. As the Argonauts finally face Amycus, they call to mind Dymas, the previously unnamed source of this information:

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<sup>33</sup> Neptune himself seems to suggest that Amycus was a product of rape (4.118-9); see chapter 1 on Peuce and rape.

*hospitis hic **primum monitus**<sup>34</sup> rediere Dymantis*

*et pauor et **monstri** subiit absentis imago,*

*atque **oculos** cuncti inter se tenuere silentes,*

(‘And then there returned here the warnings of the stranger  
Dymas, and fear came on them with the thought of the absent  
monster, and all held each other’s eyes silently’, 4.187-92).

Once again, with the Argonauts’ furtive glances here, eyes are the focus of the passage: they glance at each other, silently trying to communicate using only their eyes. Finally, as the inevitable battle looms, Pollux ends up facing Amycus alone (4.222-5), and as Amycus surveys the slight man he is going to fight, he seals his monstrous status through his eyes. As Pollux rises, Amycus *fremit ausum / sanguineosque rotat furiis ardentibus **orbes*** (‘rages at his daring, and rolls his bloodshot eyes in a blazing fury’, 4.234-5).<sup>35</sup>

Even before Amycus plays a direct role in the plot, there is no doubt that he is something more than the thug he appears to be in Apollonius.<sup>36</sup> The fact that Amycus is presented here as living in a cave is an important new feature, which does not appear in earlier versions of Amycus’ story. Caves are sinister places which are the usual abode of monsters, and so the choice to not only house Amycus in a such a place, but to describe it in such gory detail, and to set the action of the boxing match

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<sup>34</sup> Note also that *monitus*, a word etymologically connected with monsters, appears in close proximity. See above.

<sup>35</sup> In *orbes* we receive conclusive proof that Amycus has more than one eye. On blazing eyes and madness, see Hershkowitz (1998a, 90-3).

<sup>36</sup> But see Shelton (1994, 20) on Pollux casting doubt on Amycus’ untouchable monstrous status at 4.191-2. For Murgatroyd (2009, 76), Amycus is ‘not just villain, but a real monster’.

at its mouth, highlights his monstrosity.<sup>37</sup> Just as we saw during the encounter with the monster at Sigeum, once again a connection is made between eyes and monstrous behaviour. There are further allusions to vision in the fight scene, since the Argonauts watch the fight as well as some of the gods, and the shades of Amycus' former victims are permitted to view the fight: *et pater orantis caesorum Tartarus umbras / nube caua tandem ad merita spectacula*<sup>38</sup> *pugnae / emittit* ('at their request father Tartarus sends out the shades of the dead in a cavernous cloud to witness the spectacle of the deserved fight, at last', in 4.258-60).<sup>39</sup> It is clear that the condition of the monster's eyes and vision and spectacle play a significant role in constructing monstrous behaviour and identity here.<sup>40</sup>

It has been suggested<sup>41</sup> that in this focus on eyes, there is a direct link between Amycus and characters in other epics: for example, to Apollonius' Polydeuces looking at Amycus with 'rolling eyes' (AR 2.25), to Turnus as he: *ardentis oculorum orbis ad moenia torsit* ('he twisted the burning globes of his eyes to the walls', *Aen.* 12.670), Dido's bloodshot eyes: *sanguineam uoluens aciem* (*Aen.* 4.643) and in particular, Amata (*Aen.* 7.399).<sup>42</sup> Whilst all of these characters are indeed doomed victims of their own madness,<sup>43</sup> one character in the *Argonautica* displays intriguing ocular behaviour and yet bucks this trend: for Medea is not

<sup>37</sup> Another important intertextual reference is that of Cacus (*Aen.* 8.193-267 and *Fasti* 1.555-8; see also Livy 1.7 – see Summers 1894, 30). Murgatroyd (2008, 385) concludes that this episode is more grim than Virgil's or Ovid's descriptions of Cacus' cave. He goes on: 'here Valerius caps Virgil too, and also caps Ovid himself, and Apollonius and Homer at the same time. This is to out-Ovid Ovid'. See also Korn (1989), Hershkowitz (1998b, 81), and Spaltenstein (2004, 247).

<sup>38</sup> Zissos (2003, 663-8) discusses the 'recasting' of the Bebrycia episode as a 'recognisable arena event' (ibid., 666). See Kroner (1968, 733-54) on Valerius' artistic purpose and understanding of boxing. On spectacle and political engagement of the arena imagery in Lucan, see Leigh (1997).

<sup>39</sup> Zissos (2003, 663); the 'third internal audience is almost certainly a Valerian innovation'.

<sup>40</sup> Note that even after he is dead, others see Amycus as monstrous: Lycus tells the Argonauts that they know of Amycus' demise: *illum in sanie taboque recenti / uidimus aequoreo similem per litora monstro*. ('We saw him in recent blood and like a sea monster on the shores,' 4.749-50) Here *uidimus* indicates that a visual confirmation of Amycus' monstrosity has taken place. In death, the monstrous Amycus resembles his father.

<sup>41</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 86-7).

<sup>42</sup> See above for more on Amata and Turnus.

<sup>43</sup> Hershkowitz (1998a and 1998b, 90-1).

doomed to die. Rolling and twisting eyes, or misty or bloodshot eyes, flag up the sinister or unwise behaviour of characters in these works, and Medea's ocular activity should be considered in the light of the threatening behaviour displayed by both the monster at Sigeum and by Amycus. On comparing their behaviour, it is clear that whilst Medea is intertextually complex, major forerunners for her are also to be found in the Valerian *Argonautica*, and they are monstrous in nature. However, Medea differs from her monstrous forebears in that rather than perishing due to her own madness or monstrosity, she helps Jason defeat three other monsters, and had the story continued, she may also have potentially helped him defeat Talos, as she does in Apollonius (AR 4.1662-72). Eventually, Medea will marry in a cave, the traditional home of monsters and in this story, a transgressive location with a troubling mythological history involving rape and change. Furthermore, as the famous myth continues through a variety of other texts, she will go on to kill her children. When this occurs her metamorphosis will be complete, and Jason finally identifies her as the monster she has truly become.

### **5.3 Medea the monster: eyes and vision**

The close links between the ocular and the monstrous as presented by Valerius have been examined. The accounts of monsters which the Argonauts encounter at both Bebrycia and Sigeum both include intriguing descriptions of their eyes and vision, with the former suffering bloodshot eyes and possessing a familial link to the one-eyed Cyclopes, and the latter rising from the waves with strange, cloudy blue-grey eyes. During these episodes there are also descriptions of the eyes and effects on



vision of those involved in the scene, such as the Argonauts and Hesione. Where monsters appear in the text in an unexpected and more abstract, figurative way, ocular issues continue to be a concern, and the involvement of female deities also becomes a factor. For example, Cyzicus attracts the wrath of Cybele, who uses the earthly god Pan to create havoc between the Doliones and the Argonauts, and bring about *noua monstra* for the hero. Repeated references to the Furies underscore the notion of revenge in this episode, but also the monstrous nature of what happens as the Argonauts turn back to their friends' land in error and kill the inhabitants, believing them to be Colchians. As day breaks, the *monstra* are revealed, and Tiphys perceives them on the shoreline.

Monsters and the ocular are once again in the foreground when another female deity wishes to exact revenge, in the first of two prominent occasions in which a disguised Venus features in Valerius' epic. In book 2, she exacts her revenge on the Lemnians for their neglect of her worship, and does so by not only donning a disguise which alters her appearance, but also involves the direct action of the monstrous Fury Fama. Drawing upon the episodes involving Allecto in the *Aeneid*, Valerius constructs Venus as a monstrous character able to affect not only people's perception of an event and render her victims stupefied, but also able to alter the physiological condition of their eyes. Venus behaves monstrously in doing all of this, and employs a monstrous counterpart to assist her. In book 7, she reappears in disguise, this time attempting to ensnare Medea herself, and to trick her into helping Jason when the maiden begins to waver in her resolve. Once again, eyes and vision are important, as Venus' altered appearance, as well as her words, is designed to persuade Medea. However here we begin to see the strength of Medea, as her eyes and vision are not affected in the same way as the other characters. Furthermore,

issues of the loss of identity, change of identity, mistaken identity, and unknown identity are all at play here, with the expectations of both the reader and the characters overturned repeatedly.

Initially, as Medea first encounters Venus-as-Circe, she sees through the disguise for a fleeting moment, and perceives a Fury to be in her place. This is, in effect, an inversion of the scene involving Turnus not seeing through the disguised Allecto (*Aen.* 7.445-55), and is the first hint that Medea is able to deal with monsters in a different way. Medea is most often represented as a sinister and supernatural character, and Valerius does not refrain from developing this side of her; however it is not enough for us to read Medea in this work as transgressive simply because she is so in earlier texts. It is important to recognise that where Valerius has innovated in so many areas of his work, no less an innovative eye has been cast over Medea, and what emerges is that she is figured as a monstrous character in her own right: a witchy woman who understands monsters, who experiences them, and is able to kill them; furthermore, she marries the man whose children she will bear (and later kill in a monstrous fashion) in a cave, a feature of the landscape which is the usual home to monsters, with its own disturbing past.

Valerius presents Medea as a troubling entity from her very first mention (5.217), where he calls upon the Muse to help him deal with her. In examining Medea's involvement throughout the work, we shall see that as the episodes of her monstrosity begin to build she transgresses her role as actor in the plot to become a prominent driver of the action, and perhaps even human-Muse. She can therefore be seen as a hybrid entity, straddling the human and the divine, and as such, as a monstrous figure. Monsters are explicitly mentioned in connection with her where we would not expect this to occur; Valerius also includes a scene of *teichoscopia*

involving Medea at Colchis, which compels us to consider Medea's actions as a viewer, and thus, to also think about her eyes. Valerius begins to exploit the imagery of eyes and their connection with monsters which he has established throughout the poem, culminating with Medea displaying the same ocular phenomena as other (male) monsters in the text such as Amycus and the sea-creature at Sigeum. When viewed together, this collection of examples build a picture of a character that transcends her usual and familiar role, and becomes the monster to which the text has been pointing throughout.

The Valerian Medea is undoubtedly an intertextually complex character,<sup>44</sup> and elsewhere intertextual comparisons have been made between her and Homer's Helen and Nausicaa,<sup>45</sup> Virgil's Dido,<sup>46</sup> and Lucan's Erictho,<sup>47</sup> but comparisons with the monster at Sigeum and Amycus have not been attempted. It will be clear that as well as considering the characteristics of her feminine forbears, Valerius' Medea also transgresses the boundaries of gender, since clear comparisons between her own behaviour and that of the extreme and dangerous male monsters which the Argonauts have faced on their journey can also be made, using ocular issues as the key to these comparisons. The Valerian Medea ends up being a monstrous character, which is perhaps unsurprising in a world devoid of boundaries and where transgression is the order of the day; one who transgresses the boundaries not only of her former selves, but also in terms of her abilities as a person (and a human), her power as a witch, and even her relationship with the very person writing her: the poet.

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<sup>44</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, 95) for bibliography on Medea's intertextual history, and on Valerius' Medea specifically.

<sup>45</sup> See for example Wijsman (1996, 166 and *ad* 378-90). Hunter (1993, 12-15, 64, 67) compares the Apollonian Medea to Nausicaa, Helen, Calypso, Penelope, and Circe.

<sup>46</sup> Hershkowitz (1998, 95-100), amongst others.

<sup>47</sup> For example, McIntyre (2008).

## 5.4 Medea's introduction<sup>48</sup>

The involvement of Medea is first hinted at 5.217-24, where the narrator asks for the assistance of the Muse (*dea*, 5.217) to help him tell the next stage of the story:

*uentum ad furias infandaque natae  
foedera et horrenda trepidam sub uirgine puppem:  
impia **monstriferis** surgunt iam proelia campis.*<sup>49</sup>

('We are come to the violent passions and unutterable treaty  
of the girl, and how the vessel shuddered beneath the dreadful  
maid: now the impious battle rises up from the monster-  
bearing fields', 5.219-21).<sup>50</sup>

Medea is the female in question, and the text is so urgent that we assume she will be immediately introduced to play a role in the action, with *uentum* introducing a new subject.<sup>51</sup> However, Valerius delays her introduction into the plot for some 112 lines, as he instead begins to flesh out not only the events which surround Medea at home, but also the political situation in Colchis, which will dominate book 6, a book which comprises entirely new material. The monsters alluded to are mentioned in close proximity to Medea. There is, therefore, an immediate and subtle link made between the two; a link which may, if it was the sole reference, be overlooked; however this is

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<sup>48</sup> See Clauss and Johnston (1997) and Bartel and Simon (2010) for more on Medea.

<sup>49</sup> See Spaltenstein (2004, 443-5). Hershkowitz (1998b, 120 n.72) sees this as an occlusion of Medea's important assistance, which in turn fortifies Jason's character. 'The monsters meant are the fire-breathing bulls and the Earthborn', (Wijsman 1996, 127).

<sup>50</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998a, 31-4) on 'Medea's madness and its epic centrality to his story', which goes on to 'shape the narrative of the second half of his epic'.

<sup>51</sup> Spaltenstein (2004, 443).

only the beginning of a series of references which build to create a foreboding picture of Medea. We shall return to the importance of the invocation itself below.

Next, Valerius narrates the details of a dream sequence which Aeetes has had, where Phrixus has appeared to him to warn him of an upcoming crisis (5.222-40). Phrixus warns Aeetes that Medea should be sent away from his kingdom (5.238-40) and Aeetes interprets this by arranging her betrothal to an as yet unnamed Albanian king (5.257-8). As we begin to learn of fraternal civil strife between Aeetes and Perses (5.259-77), *monstra* are brought to the fore once again:

*Interea auguriis monstrisque minacibus urbem  
territat ante monens semper deus, et data seri  
signa mali. reddi iubet exitiale sacerdos  
uellus et Haemoniis infaustum mittere terris.*

(‘Meanwhile the god who always warns frightens the city with omens and threatening portents/monsters and gives signs of late calamity; the priest orders the unpropitious, deadly Fleece to be returned and to send it to Haemonian lands’, 5.259-62).

There is no hint of which god this might be,<sup>52</sup> and the interpretation of *monstrisque minacibus* to mean ‘threatening monsters’ is also difficult.<sup>53</sup> The connection with *auguriis*, meaning ‘omens’, leads us to an interpretation of *monstris* as ‘portents’ as

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<sup>52</sup> It has been suggested that this is Fama, but Spaltenstein (2004, 456) points out that omens are not the usual doings of that goddess.

<sup>53</sup> Wijsman (1996, 140) links *monstrisque* to *Aen.* 2.171 as the sun rises over Troy; he links *minacibus* to Virgil’s *G.* 1.483-5 and *Met.* 15.571f, pointing out the alliteration with these words and *monens*.

being the most likely in this context;<sup>54</sup> and the intriguing coupling with *monens* ('warning') might support this.<sup>55</sup> However it is certain that these are foreboding lines,<sup>56</sup> and with *monens* etymologically connected to monsters. The digression continues as night falls, and a brief conversation between Juno and Pallas takes place as they discuss which group they will support in the upcoming civil war (5.278-95); we then hear of Jason's concerns and his plans to make a reconnaissance of Colchis (5.296-328) before Medea is finally introduced. Once again, however, monsters have been brought into the text prior to Medea's eventual introduction, and a substantial amount of back-story is given before she finally makes her entrance. One interpretation of Valerius' invocation of the Muse (5.217-8) may be that in some way he feels unable to take on Medea's story; perhaps this is why he does not introduce her immediately. There will be more discussion of this aspect below.

Finally, after his digression setting the scene in Colchis, the poet feels able to focus our attention on Medea:

*Forte deum<sup>57</sup> uariis per noctem territa **monstris**,  
senserat ut pulsas tandem Medea tenebras,  
rapta<sup>58</sup> toris primi iubar ad placabile Phoebi  
ibat et horrendas lustrantia flumina noctes.*

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<sup>54</sup> See above for the various interpretations of *monstrum*, both ancient and modern; Wijsman (1996, 140) links this to *Aen.* 5.522-3 and *Aen.* 3.5.

<sup>55</sup> See above for a fuller discussion of the connection between *monstrum* and *moneo*.

<sup>56</sup> The sense of foreboding is undoubtedly enhanced by the use of *exitiale* to describe the Fleece; Wijsman (1996, 140-1) discusses the 'sense of doom surrounding the Fleece'. Note that *infaustum* is used of the cave in which Medea hides once she is married (8.315). Spaltenstein (2004, 456-7) sees this as an activation of the myth of strife between Europe and Asia.

<sup>57</sup> Spaltenstein (2004, 473) wonders 'pour hasard voulu par les dieux?''.

<sup>58</sup> Note the passive sense of *rapta* here: already Medea is 'snatched away', Spaltenstein (2004, 473) sees this as a continuation of the idea of speed in these lines.

(‘By chance of the gods Medea, terrified in the night by various portents/monsters<sup>59</sup> of the gods, as soon as she had sensed the darkness had been driven away, having been snatched from her couch was going toward the sun’s first appeasing gleam and the rivers illuminating night horrors’, 5.329-32).<sup>60</sup>

When Medea’s introduction finally comes, it is sudden and urgent, with no warning that she will soon feature. Despite the earlier ominous invocation, Medea does not initially seem to be the troubling character we might expect. In fact, she seems to be quite a pathetic character.<sup>61</sup> Any suspended sense of foreboding which has been built up so far is reanimated when we consider the monstrous content of Medea’s dreams,<sup>62</sup> which reflects *monstris* at 5.259<sup>63</sup> and *monens* at 5.260. Medea’s nightmares are the beginnings of the calamities to come, as she has been dreaming of a future self, a Medea familiar to us from earlier texts:<sup>64</sup>

*namque soporatos tacitis in sedibus artus*

*dum premit alta quies nullaeque in pectore curae,*

<sup>59</sup> Here is an instance in which the translation of this word is difficult. This once again plays into the transgressive nature of monsters, and of the word used to name them in Latin: they are difficult to pin down, from whichever angle you tackle them.

<sup>60</sup> See Stover (2003) on the ‘generic destabilisation produced by Medea’s entrance’ as ‘formulated in terms of an instability in Jason’s masculinity’ (ibid., 124).

<sup>61</sup> Spaltenstein (2004, 444) sees Valerius as ‘romanesque mais conventionnel, et son portrait de Médée comme jeune fille est grandement stéréotypé, avec sa naïveté, son ignorance, etc’. The sunshine she seeks is here presented as *Phoebus*; the river is also of interest, not least since it is the river Danube which rapes Peuce in book 8, a story we learn during their wedding scene. The river in this scene, the Phasis, also sexually attacked a nymph, Aea, as depicted in the ecphrasis of the temple doors (5.425-8, on which see Wijsman (1996, 207-10), Buckley (forthcoming) and chapter 2.3). See Wijsman (1996, 167) on washing after portentous dreams; see Lovatt (forthcoming) on the female dream as ‘one way of approaching the female gaze in epic’.

<sup>62</sup> Wijsman (1996, 167) sees the *monstra deum* as ‘an example of divine manipulation of decisions free in appearance only’, and questions the spontaneity implied by *forte*.

<sup>63</sup> Wijsman (1996, 167) also makes this connection.

<sup>64</sup> For the Apollonian Medea’s dream, see AR 3.616-32.

*uisa pauens castis Hecates excedere lucis;  
dumque pii petit ora patris, stetit arduus inter  
pontus et ingenti circum <est> stupefacta profundo,  
fratre tamen conante sequi.<sup>65</sup> mox stare pauentes  
uiderat<sup>66</sup> intenta pueros nece seque trementem  
spargere caede manus et lumina rumpere fletu.*

(‘For while deep sleep presses her sleeping limbs in her silent room. and there are no cares in her heart, she seems, in fear, to depart from Hecate’s chaste groves, and while she seeks the face of her pious father, the harsh sea stands up between them and she is stupefied by the mighty deep all around her, with her brother still trying to follow. Soon she saw her children standing in fear of the threatened slaughter, and that she, trembling, stained her hands with gore and her eyes burst with tears’, 5.333-40)<sup>67</sup>

The description of Medea’s psychologically realistic<sup>68</sup> dream appears to foreshadow what happens between her and Jason, focussing on what happens to Medea once she has left Colchis.<sup>69</sup> A glimpse of the future, this dream represents Medea’s intense

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<sup>65</sup> We do not know whether Medea was intended to kill her brother in this version; Wijsman (1996, 170-1) sees this as a likely implication here. Spaltenstein (2004, 443-4, *ad* 5.219-21) points out that Valerius cannot evade the traditional idea of Medea as infanticide, despite sometimes implying she is a plaything of the gods.

<sup>66</sup> Wijsman (1996, 171) points out the unusual nature of *mox* followed by a pluperfect tense verb; ‘an event-to-be is recounted as seen in a past dream’. The unstoppable nature of Medea’s monstrosity is once more highlighted in this epistolary use.

<sup>67</sup> See Spaltenstein (2004, 471-6) on these lines.

<sup>68</sup> Wijsman (1996, 169; see 169-71 on the scene more generally).

<sup>69</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, 19-20) on the proleptic nature of this scene. She argues that since Jason is missing, Medea can be forgiven for misunderstanding what is happening, and for not recognising the



fear via stupefaction (*stupefacta*, 5.337). Being frozen due to a perilous sight is a trope to which we shall return; for now, it is sufficient to say that Medea seems to be highly disturbed and frightened by her dream, in which she was also affected in terms of her vision and her eyes. She is able to look into the future and see a version of her life with which we are familiar, but with which she cannot be. She is young and inexperienced (*castis lucis* confirms her virginity),<sup>70</sup> but even at this stage she is beginning to show signs of foresight, which she does not as yet understand. For Medea dreaming of *monstra*, with the further description of the content of the dream showing that she was in fact dreaming of her future self, is telling. On some level, Medea knows that one day she will become that monster.

The dream drives her to the river, where she meets Jason and the Argonauts for the first time; monsters have therefore driven them together. Indeed, as Jason and Medea approach each other, the theme of stupefaction continues: she is described as *attonito* ('in astonishment', 5.373), *mirata* ('marvelling', 5.374), and *stupuit* ('struck dumb', 5.375) at the sight of him.<sup>71</sup> Medea has not yet been afflicted by the machinations of the goddesses who will shortly conspire to make her fall for Jason. Nonetheless, at this stage Medea is still in the early stages of displaying notable ocular behaviour and repeated links to monsters. The links between her future monstrous self and understanding of monsters comes into play in book 6, when Jason has agreed to fight for Aeetes in the civil war which is about to ensue. Let us now

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danger in Jason when he does arrive. Spaltenstein (2004, 474-5) points out that the dream is reminiscent of Ilia's dream in Ennius (*Annals* 35f); Ilia is of course another character raped by a river, like Aea in book 5 and Peuce in book 8 (see above). Stover sees ominous references to Jason and Medea's future framing their initial meeting (5.338-40 and 5.442-54).

<sup>70</sup> Wijsman (1996, 169); Spaltenstein (2004, 474).

<sup>71</sup> Wijsman (1996, 188) connects *stupuit* and *mirata*, citing *Aen.* 1.495 and *Aen.* 1.613 as potential models; on both Virgilian occasions, Dido was transfixed. Spaltenstein relates these words to *haeret* (5.376) and *defixus* (377), 'qui multiplient la même idée', and words which inspire and evoke the future love between Jason and Medea.

turn to this scene, to examine how monsters continue to pervade the plot, and allow us the opportunity to consider them as a tool for exploring transgression.

### 5.5 Gods and Monsters at Colchis

Prior to Medea's involvement in it, the transgressive nature of the civil war is firmly underpinned by the surprising addition of monsters. Minerva taunts Mars by raising the issue of his monstrosity by referring to his mother, Juno: *monstrum superis quae tale creauit* ('certainly she was worthy, she who begat such a monster of the gods', 5.657).<sup>72</sup> As Mars angrily rises to counter her argument, Jupiter intervenes (5.673-89), laying out the course of the battle as it has been fated. This seemingly calms the altercation, and book 5 ends with a reference to the Phlegraean battle (5.690-5), keeping the monstrous firmly in our minds, as we move onto a book comprised of entirely new material, and which constitutes a major site of Valerian innovation (or perhaps poetic transgression, in the light of earlier versions).

It soon becomes clear that the god of war was not placated by Jupiter's intervention at the end of book 5, and in his involvement with the civil war, Mars decides to take a route now familiar to us; that of disguise: *ire placet tandem praesenque tueri* ('at length, he decides to go and, being present to oversee [the battle], 6.3).<sup>73</sup> Mars seems to be keen to mix with the humans undetected and to appear in person to do so; this is reminiscent of the behaviour of his mistress, Venus, who will soon go to Medea 'herself' (though, in disguise) to try to influence her, in

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<sup>72</sup> Wijsman (1996, 292) refers to *Il.* 5.890, or 5.892, as inspiration.

<sup>73</sup> See Wijsman (2000, 19); Baier (2001, 123-4); Spaltenstein (2005, 7-8).  $\gamma$  has *uideri* rather than *tueri*, which would give the sense of Mars *seeming* to be present. This suggests disguise even more strongly.

book 7.<sup>74</sup> This idea of the divine epiphany is striking: Mars would surely also need to adopt a disguise if he is able to move freely amongst the humans. Minerva adopts the appearance of the Gorgon to stand with Jason as the battle commences (6.173-6),<sup>75</sup> and soon, Juno will also appear disguised as Medea's sister Chalciope, to guide her to the walls to watch the battle unfold. The sliding of the limits of identity is once again at issue. For now, the narrator finally underpins the frightening and monstrous nature of the episode by describing the disguised Mars as 'shaking the irrevocable portent of war', (*monstrum inreuocabile belli concutiens*, 6.6-7),<sup>76</sup> and describing his voice as being of great volume, reminiscent of Alcimedede, Hercules and Pan: *uoxque dei partiter turmas audita per omnes* ('the voice of the god was heard through every part of the field', 6.32).<sup>77</sup>

Valerius requires the help of the Muses once again to commence the catalogue (*Musa, mone*, 'Muse, guide me', 6.34).<sup>78</sup> The language he chooses here is reminiscent of 1.5, where we find *Phoebe, mone*.<sup>79</sup> It is less likely, however, that here the poet needs to be reminded of the story of the civil war at Colchis, since his major literary model, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes, makes only a passing mention of a war of conquest with the Sauromatae (AR 3.352-3 and 3.392-

<sup>74</sup> See below.

<sup>75</sup> See Wijsman (2000, 85-6); Baier (2001, 160-1); Spaltenstein (2005, 57-8). See also Dinter (2009). At this stage, the Fury Tisiphone is described as stalking the battle-lines with the personified Panic (6.179-81). The two are connected once again, when Minerva becomes involved in the battle, frightening Ariasmenus' horses with her snaky, Medusa-like aegis (6.396-401). Her actions are once again compared to the Fury Tisiphone, stirring up the Roman legions involved in a civil war (6.402-9).

<sup>76</sup> Wijsman (2000, 20-1). Baier (2001, 125) considers this to be the same sort of *monstrum* as the girdle described as *fecunda monstris* (6.470). 'On comprend usuellement que ce *monstrum* est la lance de Mars...en effet, *monstrum* peut aussi être une apposition de *currus*' (Spaltenstein 2005, 8).

<sup>77</sup> Wijsman (2000, 28) points out that Juno's voice is louder than Stentor's in *Il.* 5.784ff and links this to Mars in Statius' *Theb.* 3.420ff. See above for discussion of Alcimedede, Pan and Hercules. See also Baier (2001, 131).

<sup>78</sup> See Wijsman (2000, 29-32) for discussion of various parallels. For Baier (2001, 132) these words signify the beginning of the 'Iliadic part' of the poem, with both Virgil and Valerius using the imperative *mone* to introduce the 'second half' of their poems; furthermore, he sees a link since both narrators here enter their respective poems. For *Musa* and cognates of *moneo* together elsewhere, *PHI* brings up Horace's *Epistulae* 1.3.12-16 to Julius Florus and Sulpicia, *Caleni uxor*, *De Statu Rei Publicae* [sp.] 59.

<sup>79</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 13-4) also links this line with 1.5, as well as with *Aen.* 7.37: *nunc age*.

5). Here, almost a whole book is devoted to the episode; therefore a request for a prompt to jog the memory seems futile, and out of place. We have already seen the links<sup>80</sup> between the verb *moneo* and the noun *monstrum*, and Valerius has chosen to include this new invocation at a moment of innovation in terms of the plot; furthermore, in this instance, the invocation comes between two explicit mentions of the involvement of monsters, since Mars' monstrous nature has already been explored, and as the catalogue begins, we are about to hear once again of the future behaviour of Medea:

*Miserat ardentem mox ipse secutus Alanos*<sup>81</sup>  
*Heniochosque truces iam pridem infensus Anausis,*  
*pacta quod Albano coniunx Medea tyranno,*  
*nescius, heu, quanti thalamos ascendere **monstri***  
*arserit atque urbes maneat qui terror Achaeas.*

(‘The fiery Alani and fierce Heniochi had sent Anausis, himself following soon, long since enraged because Medea was betrothed to the Albanian tyrant; alas unknowing of how great a monster she for whom he burned grew to be, and what terror lay in store for Achaean cities’, 6.42-6)

Anausis, a potential suitor for Medea who has lost out to Styrrus, is described as ignorant of the monstrous behaviour which would be exhibited by Medea in future.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See above.

<sup>81</sup> See Wijsman (2000, 35) and Baier (2001, 133-4) on these tribes.

<sup>82</sup> Wijsman (2000, 36) suggests that ‘few readers will not substitute Jason, who is as unwittingly a victim as Anausis nearly had been’, and that *monstri* is an allusion to the tragedy in Corinth. He goes

Here again is a hint of Medea's monstrosity, a further surprising inclusion at this stage, not least since the gods have not yet begun to trick her into falling for Jason. On the battlefield Anausis taunts Styruis, and they clash violently (6.265-78). Styruis fatally wounds his rival, and as he dies, Anausis calls out that Medea will not be able to heal Styruis of the wound he has sustained either through spells (*carmine*, 6.275) or herbs (*uenenis*, 6.266).<sup>83</sup> Once again, Medea's reputation as a sinister witch precedes her, and the extent of her powers is hinted.<sup>84</sup> The direct links between monstrosity and Medea are beginning to be put into place,<sup>85</sup> and these will be reinforced even more strongly once the female goddesses become involved.

### 5.6 It's all in the eyes: the Teichoscopia and its aftermath

Medea was brought into the poem by way of an invocation which includes a hint of monsters, and has already been linked with the monstrous occurrences in her future, as shown to her in her dream. Within the dream itself she became stupefied at what she could see, actions which were mirrored when she first saw Jason. In book 6,

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on to describe as 'peculiar' the fact that at 6.491 Medea is not described as a *monstrum* but as *nescia uirgo mali*; 'as usual, VF [Valerius Flaccus] postulates much knowledge in the reader'. Baier (2001, 134) sees the *monstra* here as similar to those cited in 6.152-3; Hershkowitz (1998b, 16-7) points out that this is one of a chain of episodes which show the 'disastrous union of Jason and Medea'. Note that Apollonius' Medea is not engaged.

<sup>83</sup> See Baier (2001, 177-80) for discussion of this episode involving Styruis.

<sup>84</sup> Wijsman (2000, 120).

<sup>85</sup> The quest for the Fleece has inspired many tribes to send warriors to be involved in the fight ; amongst them are those well versed in the dark arts (6.150-7), and all are *omnibus artes monstrificae* ('all are skilled in monstrous things', 6.152-3). Here, an individual named Coastes is introduced. He fights only to become involved with Medea, and has similar talents to Medea in the dark arts: *maximus hos inter Stygia venit arte Coastes; sollicitat nec Martis amor, sed fama Cytaeae / virginis et paribus spirans Medea venenis*, ('Greatest amongst them in Stygian skill comes Coastes; love of Mars does not stir him, but fame of the Cytaean maid, and Medea breathing comparable poisons,' 155-7). This is a significant reference to Medea's witchiness (with Wijsman (2000, 77) agreeing that Cytaeae is Medea, rather than Circe), and a disturbing connection to her fame. The personified Fama is an entity which has already appeared in monstrous guise in this poem. An individual, greatest of the ones 'skilled in monstrous things', knows of Medea and is inspired by her fame to get involved in the war, rather than by a lust for the Fleece, or through terror. See Spaltenstein (2006, 51).

Medea takes part in a scene which focuses even more closely on her ocular behaviour, and once again involves a deity in disguise.<sup>86</sup> The issues of identity, transgression, and monsters are once again aligned, with the murky and confusing world that Valerius creates being once again thrust into the limelight. This time, Juno appears as Medea's sister Chalciope,<sup>87</sup> leading Medea to the walls to watch a gruesome battle of the civil war take place. It is this viewing behaviour which enhances Medea's monstrosity.<sup>88</sup> Juno also uses a girdle which she has procured from Venus, another deity with a previous history of monstrous behaviour. All of these actions reinforce the fact that Medea is already emerging as a character with intriguing connections to monstrosity, even at this early stage of her life. However just as monsters are difficult to pin down in their transgressive nature, the nature of the encounter between Juno and Medea is also convoluted; something of a power struggle ensues, and while it may initially seem that Juno's machinations are successful, it soon becomes clear that this is not the case, and Venus is required to adopt another disguise to fully bring Medea in line with their plans.

Following the lengthy and confusing battle narrative, potentially reflecting metapoetically the complicated nature of not only the battle but also the motivation for it, Juno makes her appearance. She can see that at this stage of the battle, Jason cannot win (6.427-32); moreover she is concerned that even if he should survive, Aeetes will simply ask him to undertake an even more deadly and monstrous task:

*haec etenim Minyas ne iungere Marte peracto*

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<sup>86</sup> Zissos (2003, 668-9) sees the Teichoscopia as 'a schematised gladiatorial show, with Jason as the star performer'. Cf. Feeney (1991, 326), who believes this set-piece is undermined, 'to become an occasion for the girl to fall in love with her future husband'. This scene could also be part of a wider plan to construct Medea as a monster.

<sup>87</sup> Bernstein (2008, 55-61) explores Medea's repeated 'misplaced trust in family members'.

<sup>88</sup> Barton (1993, 87) discusses the Roman fascination with monsters, arguing that 'to see the Roman monster, we must look into the gaze of the Roman spectator' (ibid., 87).

*monstra satis iubeat Cadmei dentibus hydri*

*ante diem, timet et uarias circumspicit artes.*

(‘For she fears that with the war over, he might order the Minyae sow the dragons’ teeth and yoke the monsters, before the day is out, and looks around for various ruses,’ 6.436-8).<sup>89</sup>

Juno understands that Jason will not overcome the monsters alone,<sup>90</sup> and in searching for a solution, Medea springs to mind: *sola animo Medea subit, mens omnis in una / uirgine, nocturnis qua nulla potentior aris* (‘Medea alone comes into her mind, her mind is all on the maiden alone, than whom none is more potent at the nocturnal altars’, 6.439-40).<sup>91</sup> Juno is unable to think of anyone more suitable, or indeed to think of anyone else entirely, to help Jason with this task. It has been suggested that Valerius’ intention was to shorten the similar scene in Apollonius;<sup>92</sup> however in fact Juno’s actions here reflect Medea’s fixation on Jason when she first sees him, and her inability to cease thinking about him later.<sup>93</sup> This description of Juno’s fixation on Medea reflects Medea’s own fixation, coming just after the mention of monsters, and brings goddess and mortal closer together. The boundaries between mortal and divine are now beginning to become blurred via the medium of transgressive monsters.

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<sup>89</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 259 n.49) points out that this episode is founded on deception.

<sup>90</sup> Feeney (1991, 325-7).

<sup>91</sup> Lovatt (2006, 77) sees her as ‘a powerful sorceress, she is the transgressive, terrifying Medea of previous myth who will destroy her Jason and her own children’.

<sup>92</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 129).

<sup>93</sup> Fucecchi (1997, ad loc.) points out that *sola* and *una*, the words which bookend 6.439, are related, and highlight Medea’s solitude; Wijsman (2000, 174-5) sees a link to Virgil’s Dido. Baier (2001, 203) argues: ‘Zu vergleichen ist Medeas Frage 7,13-14: *quid in hospite solo / mens mihi?* Medea ist wie Juno auf ein einzige Idee fixiert, die jedes weitere Nachdenken, das Finden anderer Loesungen ausschließt’.

As the text itself begins to focus on Medea more closely, an extended description presents Medea in terms of other witches from the literary record (6.441-8).<sup>94</sup> Juno realises that Medea's own innate power could be usefully augmented and ignited further with the power of lust behind it:

*non aliam tauris uidet et nascentibus armis  
quippe parem nec quae medio stet in agmine flammae.  
nullum mente nefas, nullos horrescere uisus:  
quid si **caecus** amor saeuusque accesserit ignis?*

(‘for in fact she sees none other as equal to the bulls and the nascent warriors, nor for the flame which stood in the middle of the ranks: nothing in her mind was unspeakable, she feared no sight. What if blind fire and savage love is added?’ 6.451-4)

Medea is here described as ‘fearing no sight’; her disregard for right and wrong is linked to fearless vision.<sup>95</sup> A further nod to the ocular is made during this description, with the intriguing adjective *caecus*, meaning ‘blind’, being used to describe the sort of love which Juno is going to inflict on Medea; this is a particularly evocative word since so much of Medea's monstrous behaviour, and that of others, has been so

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<sup>94</sup> See Wijsman (2000, 175-9), Baier (2001, 201-8), and Spaltenstein (2005, 130-3.) for other comparisons of witchy behaviour; see above for analysis of this passage.

<sup>95</sup> Lovatt (2006, 77). For Hershkowitz (1998b, 169), Juno manipulates the fact that Medea is a virgin in order to activate her power, for Jason's benefit. Baier (2001, 208-9), this fearless Medea foreshadows Seneca's tragic Medea.



explicitly connected with both eyes and vision.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, Juno will soon adopt a disguise and lead Medea to the walls to watch Jason in action, in an effort to bewitch her and make her fall in love with him. To describe that love as ‘blind’ at this juncture forces us to consider carefully not only the nature of this ‘love’, but also the characteristics of Juno’s victim.

Juno does not act alone in trying to bring this powerful maiden under her control; she seeks out a goddess who has already appeared in a monstrous disguise to wreak havoc: Venus.<sup>97</sup> At this stage, Medea is in fact the victim of a two-phase attack, with the first being Juno’s disguise as Chalciope and intoxicating viewing from the walls, and the second being the effects of Venus’ girdle.<sup>98</sup> The necessity of a combined attack underlines Medea’s innate power as a monstrous and transgressive character. Juno approaches Venus and asks her for the equipment which will ensnare the Colchian (6.460-6). Venus obliges, not least since she has long wanted to destroy the Colchians: *inuisi genus omne excindere Phoebi* (6.468).<sup>99</sup> This refers to Ares and Aphrodite’s affair, as revealed by Helios,<sup>100</sup> which also played a part in Venus’ destruction of the Lemnian men in book 2. In a scene modelled on *Il.* 14.193-216, Venus gives Juno a girdle, bestowed with the power to intoxicate the wearer via the medium of monsters:

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<sup>96</sup> cf. *Aen.* 4.2 : *et caeco carpitur igni*. Wijsman (2000, 181) understands *caecus amor saevusque [...]* *ignis* thus: the two pairs of words are synonymous and the adjectives interchangeable’. The use of *caecus* here, however, in the context of vision and monsters is effective and evocative. See also Spaltenstein (2005, 134-5), who sees this as a picture of tragic love.

<sup>97</sup> See above, and Hershkowitz (1998b, 258-9) on Juno’s attempted dissimulation here.

<sup>98</sup> Indeed neither will be a complete success, since Venus herself needs to appear in disguise to Medea to finally convince her of her desire to assist Jason (see above for discussion of this).

<sup>99</sup> The Trojans are *genus inuisum* at *Aen.* 1.28.

<sup>100</sup> Wijsman (2000, 186-7) points out that a neat reference to vision is also surely being made here in calling the Colchians, offspring of the Sun (seen by all and all-seeing) *inuisi*. See below for more on *inuidia*, ‘the Evil eye’. Apollonius’ Circe (4.725-9) explains Medea’s assaultive gaze by speaking of the Colchian’s ‘flashing eyes’, and ‘pushes the idea of the assaultive gaze further than any other epic’ (Lovatt, forthcoming). Valerius, on the other hand, simply makes Medea into a monster.

*tum uero optatis potitur, nec passa precari  
 ulterius dedit acre decus fecundaque **monstris**  
 cingula, non pietas quibus aut custodia famae,  
 non pudor, at contra leuis et festina cupido  
 adfatusque mali dulcisque labantibus error  
 et metus et demens alieni cura pericli.*

(‘Then she [Juno] truly gets what she wants; suffering no further prayers, she [Venus] gives [her] the dangerous embellishment, the girdle(s) fruitful in monsters, which [knows] no piety nor guardians of shame or honour, but instead fickleness and hot desire, and evocative of calamity and sweet error for the wavering, and concern and madness and fear of another’s danger’, 6.469-74)<sup>101</sup>

Clearly, this garment is one of great power. Importantly, it is said to be *fecundaque monstris*, a factor which is clearly intended to spell disaster for the wearer.<sup>102</sup> Whilst there are several possible translations of *monstrum*,<sup>103</sup> the word is now a powerful one when given in proximity to Medea, given her various links to monsters so far in the text. At this stage, her relationship with the monstrous is becoming more conspicuous, but also more complex, and once again boundaries are beginning to be

<sup>101</sup> See Spaltenstein (2005, 139-43).

<sup>102</sup> Wijsman (2000, 187) translates this as ‘fatal charms’; Baier (2001, 213) argues for its similarity both to *Iliad* 14.188-223 and for the use of *monstrum* as similar to Mars’ lance at 6.6: ‘Mit *monstra* sind einerseits die Wirkungen des Gürtels bezeichnet, andererseits steht der Begriff metonymisch für den Gürtel selbst. Derselbe Gebrauch findet sich in 6,6, wo die *hasta* des Mars als *monstrum irrevocabile belli* bezeichnet wird’.

<sup>103</sup> See above. ‘Valerius ne le fait pas en pensant uniquement à leur effet futur sur Médée: c’est plutôt une question de coloris général, Hom.l.c. proposant un récit heureux et charmant, alors que Valerius est impressionniste et dramatique.’ (Spaltenstein 2005, 140).

blurred. Warriors have entered the civil war solely because of her fame and connection with the dark arts; Medea has dreamed of her monstrous future, and the narrator has alluded to the ignorance of others in terms of the monster she will become. It therefore seems that Juno may be misguided in trying to affect Medea using a girdle which is ‘monstrous’, not least since Medea appears to understand and demonstrate monstrous behaviour of her own.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Medea has already begun to exhibit the same ocular peculiarity as other monsters in the text, such as Amycus and the creature at Sigeum, which indicates that in fact these male monsters are forerunners for her. Finally, in trying to seduce Medea into helping Jason, Juno makes a point of wishing to inflict her with *caecus amor* (‘blind love’), an ironic statement given Medea’s ocular behaviour so far. Juno herself recognises that Medea is powerful (6.441-8; 451-4), and perhaps this is why she feels the need to attack Medea in two phases.

Now that Juno has the girdle, the second phase of her plan can take place. She decides to visit Medea herself, disguised as her sister Chalciope (6.477-9).<sup>105</sup> However, Juno is initially not as successful in the art of disguise as Venus proved to be in Lemnos, and as Venus will prove to be when ultimately this two-phase plan begins to fail, in book 7.<sup>106</sup> As we might expect from someone so obviously well-versed in monsters, Medea immediately suspects that something is amiss:

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<sup>104</sup> Barton (1993, 91-2) discusses the effects of *uenena*, and characters such as Narcissus who ‘are exhausted by the object of his or her own desires’. Medea, however, is not exhausted by the sight of Jason in this scene, and does not become ‘torpid and waste away’. She is therefore markedly different from other characters who become fascinated.

<sup>105</sup> For Wijsman (2000, 477), Juno is simply doing what her husband requested: *i, Furias Veneremque move!* (‘Go, rouse Venus and the Furies!’), 4.13).

<sup>106</sup> Though notice Medea is there also able to ‘see through’ Venus’ disguise; see above for discussion of this episode.

*fulsit ab inuita numen procul, et pauor artus*  
*protinus atque ingens Aeetida perculit horror*

(‘despite herself, her divine power shone out of her from afar,  
and immediately fear and a huge horror shook the bones of  
Aeetes’ daughter’, 6.480-1).<sup>107</sup>

Juno does not give Medea a chance to answer, but instead convinces her to join the rest of the Colchians on the walls to watch the fighting (6.682-7), arguing that Medea is unlikely to ever again see such a spectacle in her home city. Juno will attempt to infect Medea with ‘blind love’ by making her *watch* her potential lover in action.

The scenes which follow are reminiscent of the teichoscopy scenes in *Il.* 3.161-244, where Priam calls Helen to watch the fighting.<sup>108</sup> Here, rather than a straightforward narration of the battle taking place, the aim of the scene is to prompt Medea to fall for Jason, with civil war as the backdrop. Transgression is therefore at the root of this scene, which marks it apart from its Iliadic forbear.<sup>109</sup> Juno leads Medea to the walls,<sup>110</sup> with language which sets out to emphasise Medea’s girlhood and naiveté:

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<sup>107</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 260 n.52) sees an ‘ironic Apollonian intertext of Circe’s recognition of Medea (AR 4.727-9) in these lines, and a further failure of Juno’s attempted dissimulation. Wijsman (2000, 190) sees ‘fine psychology’ at work in these lines; both Baier (2001, 215-6) and Spaltenstein (2005, 142) see close links with Venus disguised as Circe, discussed above. For Lovatt (forthcoming), ‘Juno is utterly in charge’.

<sup>108</sup> See Fucecchi (1997) for a detailed study of this scene. Lovatt (forthcoming) describes Medea as ‘more passive in the teichoscopy than many of her predecessors’ and the whole scene as ‘generically unstable’.

<sup>109</sup> Lovatt (2006, 59) comments that in the *Iliad*, Helen is ‘a transgressive woman acting as narrator within this most masculine of genders’. Medea therefore already has a transgressive female model in this scene, and confusingly, we should remember that this story in fact takes place *before* the war at Troy. Medea is, therefore, a forerunner for Helen.

<sup>110</sup> In contrast to *Il.* 3.121-44, where Helen is persuaded by Iris, disguised as Helen’s sister (Fucecchi 1997, 127).

*ducitur infelix*<sup>111</sup> *ad moenia summa futuri*<sup>112</sup>  
*nescia virgo mali et falsae commissa sorori;*  
*lilia per vernos lucent velut alba colores*  
*praecipue, quis vita brevis totusque parumper*  
*floret honor, fuscis et iam Notus imminet alis.*

(‘Unfortunate one, she is led to the summit of the walls, a virgin unknowing of the evil to come and entrusting herself to her false sister; just as white lilies shine through the spring colours standing out, whose short life and unbroken honour briefly flourishes, and already the South wind threatens with dark wings’, 6.490-4).

The simile here evokes the idea of dying beautiful boys,<sup>113</sup> such as Ovid’s Hyacinth, and the death of masculine love as depicted by Catullus (61.185-8), thus blurring Medea’s gender.<sup>114</sup> This idea reflects the male monsters which have so far been the forerunner for her in this text. Juno and Medea are linked once again as they are immediately transfixed by the battle, being compared to birds clinging to tree-branches in terror (*ramis haerentque pauore uolucres*, 6.506).<sup>115</sup> A short battle

<sup>111</sup> Wijsman (2000, 192) points out the links between *infelix Medea* and *infelix Dido*.

<sup>112</sup> *futuri* perhaps highlights the fact that the audience is fully aware of what is to come. Spaltenstein (2005, 144) however comments that ‘puisque Médée va voir Jason, *mali futuri* désigne son amour futur, non pas les malheurs en général qui en découleront.’

<sup>113</sup> Lovatt (forthcoming). See also Wijsman (2000, 193); Baier (2001, 218-9); Spaltenstein (2005, 145-6).

<sup>114</sup> ‘This image is very important in underlining Medea’s powerlessness and her status as object of the gaze, particularly the divine gaze, but also the male gaze’ (Lovatt, forthcoming). Medea is also obliquely compared to Proserpina here, a woman explicitly able to live between the realms of the living and the dead. See chapter 2.3 for more on Proserpina imagery and Medea.

<sup>115</sup> See also *Georgics* 4.473-74 and *Aen.* 6.309-12. Barton (1993, 105) cites several examples of *spectatores* becoming stupefied whilst watching civil war, such as Luc. *BC* 2.16-28, Hor. *Ep.* 7.16, and Tac. *Hist.* 3.83. Lovatt (2006, 69) argues that there are two sides to viewing: ‘enjoyment of the spectacle, balanced against fear and horror’.

narrative follows this initial introduction to the viewing scene, with Valerius once again calling upon the Muse to assist him.<sup>116</sup> Our focus is then brought back to Medea's own ocular activity, when the narrative commands us, as audience to 'look' at her:

*Ecce autem muris residens Medea paternis  
singula dum magni lustrat certamina belli*

(‘Behold, Medea, seated on her father’s walls, reviews the  
separate columns of the great battle’, 6.575-6).<sup>117</sup>

Medea is guided by Juno in looking closely at Jason across the field of battle, *ac simul acres huc oculos sensusque refert animumque fauentem*, (‘and to him she turns her keen eyes and senses and favouring sensibilities’, 6.579-80). Medea continues to watch Jason very closely indeed; as she begins to pursue him, the verbs change to reflect that she seems to begin participating in a more direct manner than is possible from where she is located (*persequitur, haeret*, 6.658).<sup>118</sup> Even when Medea begins to look for her brother and betrothed spouse in the field of battle, she cannot help but be drawn to Jason (6.585-6). She attempts to feign ignorance, asking “Chalciope” who Jason is (6.588-90), with the response goading Medea to look even more closely (*aspicis*, 6.595).<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> More on this invocation below.

<sup>117</sup> Wijsman (2000, 223) highlights the links with Ovid’s Scylla (*Met.* 8.14-50). Baier (2001, 235) comments on the juxtaposition of *Medea paternis*, which highlights her later betrayal. Lovatt (2006, 69 n. 28) sees this Medea sitting as a ‘charged image: iconography of Medea often represents her in a masculine pose, standing with a sword. Here she is consciously feminized, the object of our gaze’.

<sup>118</sup> See Lovatt (2006, 70) for more on Medea’s *uaga lumina* (wandering gaze) in these scenes, and Lovatt (forthcoming) on the similarity between Jason and Medea here: both are like Dido and Aeneas.

<sup>119</sup> See Lovatt (forthcoming).

It is clear that Juno is operating under the idea that to view something is to be bewitched by it, and we have repeatedly seen links between ocular activity and the monstrous during this text. Juno has in her possession the girdle from Venus, itself adorned with monsters, and in taking a disguise reminds us of the monstrous behaviour of Venus and the involvement of Fama in book 2. Medea has at this point began to succumb to Juno, but it is important to keep in mind that as Juno arrived disguised as Chalciope, Medea recognised that there was something amiss, almost discerning her godly nature. It is clear that Medea, a character so often linked with the monstrous, will not easily be fooled; Juno must prey upon Medea's immaturity and naiveté in trying to ensure that Jason receives the help he needs once the battle is over. Just as Medea realises that she is herself transfixed on Jason, her eyes described as burning, she begins to question the veracity of what she can see immediately behind her; that is, the identity of her "sister":

*At regina*<sup>120</sup> *uirum (neque enim deus amouet ignem)*  
*persequitur lustrans oculisque ardentibus haeret.*<sup>121</sup>  
*fit iam laeta minus praesentis imagine pugnae*  
*castigatque metus et quas alit inscia curas,*  
*respiciens an uera soror, nec credere falsos*

<sup>120</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 99) sees an intertextual link with the *Aeneid* here, with *at regina* being the first two words of *Aen.* 4. On this, Lovatt (2006, 71) comments: 'Dido, too, falls in love with Aeneas through her gaze and as an audience of epic. When she holds and looks at Cupid masquerading as Ascanius, *haec oculis, haec pectore toto / haeret* ('she sticks to him with eyes and heart', *Aen.* 1.717; see also Fucecchi (1997, 127)). Here, in a fleeting moment Medea has begun to discern that the person with whom she is standing is in fact in disguise; Dido is not so perceptive, as she is not a monstrous character. See also *uiri* (*Aen.* 4.3), which corresponds with 6.657. The phrase *at regina* also occurs at *Aen.* 4.296, *Aen.* 4.504, and *Aen.* 12.54.

<sup>121</sup> 'What was *acres oculos* (6.579/80) becomes *oculis ardentibus haeret* (6.658). The war disappears from view and the transformation of Medea from a princess with hecatism for a hobby into a powerful sorceress passionately in love is completed' (Wijsman 2000, 252). There is an irony in Wijsman's expression that the war 'disappears from view'. Baier (2001, 252) points out the similarity between this expression and *Aen.* 1.718-8, while Spaltenstein (2205, 191-2) sees *ardentibus* as referring to Medea's 'burning passion'.

*audet atrox uultus, eademque in gaudia rursus  
labitur et saevae trahitur dulcedine flammae.*

‘(But the queen, casting her eyes about, pursues the hero with her blazing eyes and clings to him (for the god does not quench the flame); now she is becoming less happy with the scene of battle presented to her, and censures her fear and in her ignorance, feeds her concerns, looking back, whether or not she is her sister; nor does she dare to believe that savage appearance is false, but falls back again into the same joys and is dragged by the sweetness of the cruel flame’, 6.657-63).

Even as she is being bewitched by the sight in front of her, and with her eyes burning (like the rolling eyes of Amycus, or the grey-blue eyes of the monster at Sigeum), Medea is still not convinced by the sight behind her. Juno is attempting to use the intoxicating power of vision on an individual with so many monstrous qualities, an undertaking which may be doomed to fail in such an individual. Another character might have been immediately drawn into believing what they are seeing; however Medea is not. Juno finally resorts to giving Medea the *cingula*, which inflames her with a maddening passion for Jason (6.668-74),<sup>122</sup> and with a final speech imploring Medea to think about what Aeetes has in store for him, leaves her alone (6.675-80).

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<sup>122</sup> ‘Would Medea, fully familiar with witchcraft and using a *monile* filled with ‘herbs’ herself in 8.18, without more ado accept a necklace from her sister? And then, how could the ‘belt’ (cf. 6.477 *cingitur Saturnia laeta venenis*) change into a necklace? VF is at his most enigmatic here’ (Wijsman 2000, 255-6). See also Baier (2001, 253).



At this point, Medea seems to have been overcome by Juno's machinations. She stands taller from the walls (6.681-2),<sup>123</sup> and seems to feel every blow with which Jason is hit (6.683-9). Soon, Medea is so involved with the sight of Jason (6.719-20) that she ignores the plight of all others on the field. It has been suggested that 'this lack of self-control, combined with the potential power of her witchcraft, make her an incarnation of the monstrous female'.<sup>124</sup> The interaction of Medea with the goddess here is complex and confusing, qualities which reflect the nature of other transgressive scenes in the poem, with Juno going all out to ensnare the maiden using the power of the gaze. The battle may have been engineered by Juno for precisely this reason, and 'inserted [...] to snare Medea and force her into her tragic trajectory':<sup>125</sup> where Medea will be identified as a monster by a beleaguered Jason. However, in keeping with the complex nature of the relationship between the monstrous Medea and Juno, it turns out that Juno's work has not been as successful as she might have hoped. Soon the goddess is conspiring once again with Venus in order to try and overcome Medea, the mortal who so far has been able to elude the gods.

Despite Juno's attempts to use vision and the eyes, aspects closely related to monstrous behaviour, to lure Medea into falling for Jason, she has thus far been unsuccessful. Medea begins to question why she feels so strongly for Jason, and gives voice to her concerns in a lengthy monologue,<sup>126</sup> wondering aloud what madness has overcome her (7.9-20).<sup>127</sup> As Aeetes makes it clear that he has no

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<sup>123</sup> Wijsman (2000, 260) points out that Medea classified as *improba* shows that she is 'reckless': transgressing conventional standards by showing interest in a man'. For Lovatt (forthcoming), these lines show that Medea 'no longer cares' whether "Chalciope" is false or not; whereas at 6.663 Medea is 'still alert enough' to know that there is something amiss, but is seduced by love.

<sup>124</sup> Lovatt (forthcoming).

<sup>125</sup> Stover (2009a); Lovatt, (forthcoming). See Hunter (1987, 18-19 on Apollonius' foreshadowing of Euripides' Medea; see Hinds (1993, 17, 34-43) on Ovid's similar technique in *Heroides* 12.

<sup>126</sup> See Stadler (1993, 15-18 and ad loc.) on this monologue.

<sup>127</sup> In Medea's suffering, Hershkowitz (1998b, 99) sees 'the vacillations of Dido'.

intention of allowing Jason to take the Fleece, despite the Argonauts' assistance in defeating Perses in the preceding civil war (7.35-77),<sup>128</sup> Medea is left in conflict by this turn of events. She is once again described in terms of her vision and eyes in the wake of her father's devastating *volte face*:

*nec fixa solo seruare parumper  
lumina nec potuit maestos non flectere uultus,  
respexitque fores et adhuc inuenit euntem*

('she was unable to keep her eyes fixed for a while, nor keep  
her sad face from looking around, and she looked back  
towards the doors and finds him leaving', 7.105-6).<sup>129</sup>

Here, Medea does not know where to look, an action which perhaps initially reflects the fact that as a monstrous figure, she has not been as completely affected by Juno's tricks.<sup>130</sup> She may be a transgressive character, but at this point she is affected by transgression too, in that she is searching for a recognisable tenet onto which she can cling. She will be confounded. She may have been guided in her vision as she sat on the walls with "Chalciope", but she still perceived something dubious in the countenance of her "sister". Now, in the absence of the goddess, her eyes once again begin to wander, and now each reference to her ocular activity reminds us of her monstrosity. She feels a pull toward the hero, as she thinks of him as *pulchrior*

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<sup>128</sup> Aeetes calls the Argonauts *orbe sotos alio*, ('sons of another world', 7.35).

<sup>129</sup> See Stadler (1993, 50-2 and ad loc.) on Medea's second monologue.

<sup>130</sup> In Medea's eyes here, Perutelli (1997, 218) sees an echo of Ovid's *Epist.* 12.55: *oculis abeuntem prosequor udis*.

(6.107) as he leaves, and in a nod to the boundary-breaking that she inevitably will do (but is unwilling to carry out):

*illa domum atque ipsos ultra procedere postes  
optat, at ardentem tenet intra limina gressus.*

(‘she wishes that the doors themselves moved forward beyond the house, but keeps her ardent steps inside the threshold’, 7.109-10).<sup>131</sup>

Here, with the mention of the threshold of the room she is in, we also see Medea on her own threshold, and aware that she could be about to transgress a sacred boundary, and betray her father.<sup>132</sup> She is unsure of which path to take, and this conclusively shows that Juno and Venus have been unsuccessful. Her terrible situation even enters her dreams, with Medea torn between her father and Jason (7.144-5), and in the grip of her peril, she is compared to Orestes as he is being tormented by the Furies (7.145-8).<sup>133</sup> Medea is certainly being troubled by monsters,

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<sup>131</sup> At this point, Medea is compared to Io (7.111-4), being driven by the Furies. Io’s story was told briefly in an earlier digression: *Argus et in scopulos et monstris horrida lustra / ignotas iubet ire vias heu multa morantem / conantemque preces inclusa pectore verba*. (‘Argus orders her to go both onto cliff edges and unknown paths and many rugged bogs with monsters, alas, delaying and attempting prayers and words locked in her breast.’ 4.370-2). It has been pointed out that the description of Io at this point has a tinge of black humour, since Argus is a *monstrum*, and he is driving Io to other *monstra* (Murgatroyd 2009, 190). For Medea to be compared to Io here, a character who was herself earlier described as being driven by a monstrous creature towards others, with Juno playing a significant role in each episode, underpins and reinforces the monstrous nature of both goddess and Colchian. On the links between Valerius’ account and that of Ovid (*Met.* (1.583-747), see Davis (2009).

<sup>132</sup> Medea is depicted as being ‘on the threshold’ once again (7.382-4) as she makes her way through the city, armed with poisons and equipment to help Jason. Once again, Venus is on hand to lead her along (7.373-4), and as Medea begins to recite her spells into the night, even Venus is frightened by her (7.388-95).

<sup>133</sup> Dido is regularly compared to suffering at the hands of the Furies in *Aen.* 4.

so this description is apt.<sup>134</sup> However she has not been defeated, and the resolve which the goddesses encouraged in her, a resolve to help Jason, now begins to weaken. Medea, the witchy, sinister young woman, has not yet succumbed to the assaults on her sensibilities. Her complex relationship with monsters has served her well thus far, despite her turmoil.

As Juno perceives that her machinations on the walls have not been successful, she calls upon Venus to intervene herself, and Venus dons her own disguise to visit Medea. Just as she perceived something amiss with Juno's arrival disguised as Chalciope, Medea's understanding of monsters also allows her to momentarily perceive Venus' Fury-like nature (7.248-50),<sup>135</sup> in her disguise as Circe. Venus' next tactic is to cover her in Fury-like kisses (7.251-3),<sup>136</sup> and to begin a speech in which she makes out that she has herself encountered Jason. It seems that 'Jason' has asked 'Circe' to take a message to Medea:

*“per tibi siquis,” ait “morituri protinus horror  
et quem non meritis uideas occurrere **monstris**,  
haec, precor, haec dominae referas ad uirginis aurem.  
tu fletus ostende meos; illi has ego uoces,  
qua datur, hasque manus, ut possum, a litore tendo.”*

(“I pray this” he said, “if you have any dread for someone about to die, and one whom you see meeting undeserved monsters, take this message to the ear of your virgin mistress

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<sup>134</sup> See above.

<sup>135</sup> For Hershkowitz (1998b, 262), Medea does not understand ‘who or what she is seeing’ at this point, and sees this as a link to Medea’s ‘disastrous marriage’ to Jason (ibid., 17).

<sup>136</sup> As discussed above.

and show her my tears; I send these words to her, by which I  
am given, and I hold out these hands as I am able, from the  
shore””, 7.266-70).<sup>137</sup>

Venus has now added dissimulation to her performance in order to finally achieve her ends.<sup>138</sup> In claiming that Jason has raised the issue of monsters,<sup>139</sup> Venus tries to appeal to Medea’s particular skill set and nature. Both Juno and Venus have tried simply behaving in a monstrous manner to see if they can convince Medea to help the hero, and these actions have failed. Venus attempts the disguise tactic here once again, and augments it by evoking monsters themselves in an attempt to appeal to Medea, and to demonstrate that Jason alone is unable to deal with them. Medea, being monstrous herself, has heretofore been unconvinced. However, appealing to Medea by intimating that Jason has specifically called upon her for help to defeat ‘monsters’, affects Medea deeply. “Circe” then goes on to list a number of *exempla* for Medea to follow, such as Hippodamia and Ariadne (7.284-91).<sup>140</sup> Medea’s reaction to Venus’ speech is her most violent yet:

*torserat illa graui iamdudum*<sup>141</sup> *lumina uultu,*  
*uix animos dextramque tenens quin ipsa*<sup>142</sup> *loquentis*

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<sup>137</sup> See Stadler (1993, 104 and ad loc.) on these lines. Spaltenstein (2005, 283) comments on the paradox created by Venus’ use of *ipsa* at 7.220, particularly as she begins to create further pretence here.

<sup>138</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, chapter 5) on dissimulation in the poem, in general.

<sup>139</sup> Perutelli (1997, 297) links this with Jason’s actual question at 7.420-1.

<sup>140</sup> See Hershkowitz (1998b, 125 n. 91). Stover (2011) argues that these *exempla* only end up pointing Medea in the direction of her earlier, monstrous incarnations, the ‘unparalleled figure prefigured by literary tradition’.

<sup>141</sup> Here again is a reference to *Aen.* 4.1, where Dido is described as ‘long since’ having suffered her feelings for Aeneas.

<sup>142</sup> The pronoun *ipsa* here once again reminding us that in some ways this is *not* Venus, but *is* a monster. See below for discussion of how this pronoun brings Medea and Venus into closer alignment at Medea’s wedding.

*iret in ora deae; tanta pudor aestuat ira.*

*iamque toro trepidas infelix obruit aures*

*uerba cauens; horror molles inuaserat annos.*

*nec quo ferre fugam nec quo se uertere posset*

*prensa uidet. rupta condi tellure premique*

*iamdudum cupit ac diras euadere uoces.*

(‘for a long time now Medea had twisted her eyes with a grave look, and scarcely holding her right hand back from the face of the goddess as she spoke, in anger at her words: such does the shameful anger burn. Guarding against the words, horror had invaded her gentle limbs. And the wretched girl buried her alarmed ears in the couch, and was not able to see to where she could flee anywhere, nor where she could turn, trapped; long has she wished to be buried and crushed under disturbed earth, and to escape those dire voices’, 7.292-9).<sup>143</sup>

Whilst at this point Medea might begin to exhibit rolling eyes, similar to the burning and misty eyes we saw in Amycus and the monster at Sigeum, this is juxtaposed with further indications of her evident torment.<sup>144</sup> Medea is in some ways beginning to behave more obviously and outwardly like a monster: her eyes begin to roll around, in addition to their blazing when Juno was at work earlier. However, she is still in turmoil, and can see that the outcome of this will not be positive. She does not wish to hear any more; the mention of monsters and the *exempla* which “Circe” has given

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<sup>143</sup> See Stadler (1993, 111-4) and Spaltenstein (2005, 288-9) on Medea’s reaction to Venus.

<sup>144</sup> See Esteves (1982) on *torqueo* as linked to the hostile gaze in the *Aeneid*. Perutelli (1997, 307) sees Medea as being in a ‘semi-hypnotic state’ at this stage.

her drives her almost to distraction. Her wishes for death almost seem to indicate that she knows this would be the only way out of her future, which is in some ways ensured by the various terrifying accounts of her later life from earlier literature. Indeed, the language of vision once more reveals Medea's confusion and sadness as she prophetically ponders her own fate:

*uidet externo se prodere patrem*  
*dura uiro, famam scelerum iamque ipsa<sup>145</sup> suorum*  
*prospicit*

('she sees that she is heartlessly betraying her father for the  
hero, and she herself foresees the fame of her own crimes',  
7.309-11).<sup>146</sup>

Medea is heading unstoppably toward her tragic self, a self involved in ritual, witchcraft, murder and monsters, and this fate is sealed when she makes her way to her bedroom to examine her witchy equipment and poisons (7.323-33), lingering a moment to look at a particularly potent concoction which would end her life: *toto [...] lumine lustrat* ('with the full force of her vision', 7.334). Giving voice once

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<sup>145</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 292-3) questions the use of *ipsa* here, concluding that it has a sense of foreboding.

<sup>146</sup> 'Medea can see her centrality in a future tale' (Hershkowitz 1998b, 28). Notice again the connection to *fama* and the pronoun *ipsa*: this pronoun is used of Venus when she paradoxically announces that she herself will visit the Lemnians (*ipsa Venus* 2.196-8) and Medea (*sed me ipsa opus*, 7.176), when in fact she will be in disguise (see above, Hardie (2012, 200) on the 'emphatic use of *ipse* where identity is fluid'. See also Hardie (2002, 278 and index s.v. *ipse*) on *ipse* in Ovid). Medea and Venus are brought even closer into alignment at Medea's wedding, where once again *ipsa* is repeated: *ipsa suas illi croceo subtegmine vestes / induit, ipsa suam duplicem Cytherea coronam / donat et arsuras alia cum virgine gemmas*. ('Venus dresses her, giving [Medea] her own two-fold headdress and the jewels which will burn along with another bride', 8.234-6). It seems that as she marries, Medea is in disguise as Venus!

again to her worries, Medea openly admits that, at one time, even she wanted Jason dead:

*Hunc quoque, quicumque est, crudelis, Iasona nescis  
morte perire tua, qui te nunc inuocat unam,  
qui rogat heu nostro quam **primam** in litore uidit?  
cur tibi fallaces placuit **coniungere** dextras  
tunc, pater, atque istis iuuenem non perdere **monstris**  
protinus? **ipsa** etiam, fateor, tunc **ipsa**<sup>147</sup> uolebam.*

(“This Jason, whoever he is, do you not know that his death will be your own, that he now implores and appeals to you alone, and which he asked, alas, the first time he saw you on the beach? Why, father, did you decide to join right hands in falsehood, and not to destroy the young man immediately with monsters? I myself, I admit, I wanted it then”, 7.341-6).<sup>148</sup>

This passage is loaded with symbolic language. Medea recognises that she saw Jason first, *prima*, a word with transgressive implications. The mention of her seeing Jason is also important; the significance of all things visual as connected with the monstrous has been demonstrated. Arguably, *coniungere* has marital and sexual

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<sup>147</sup> Wills (1996, 78-9) discusses the geminated demonstrative pronouns of the Flavian epicists as ‘a convenient mechanism for emphasis without the showiness of expanding a heroic name’. The connection between Venus’ monstrous behaviour and the metamorphosis of Medea in Valerius seems to hold more meaning than a mechanism for emphasis.

<sup>148</sup> See Stadler (1993, 133-4).



undertones,<sup>149</sup> both experiences which Medea has not yet encountered, but soon will with Jason. Finally, and crucially, Medea makes the point that even she wanted Jason dead when he first arrived; however the text does not bear this out. Medea's behaviour since Jason's arrival (and indeed beforehand) has frequently shown her to be monstrous in her own right, and her repeated use of the emphatic pronoun *ipsa* here, used by Venus on more than one occasion when she decides to visit Medea having adopted a monstrous form, once more hints that Medea transgresses the usual boundaries of mortal behaviour, and is beginning to stray into the monstrous.<sup>150</sup>

Aeetes' hesitation has in fact set up a situation in which Jason is able to finally face monsters himself, something which he has not been able to do so far on this quest, despite the crew facing a number of dangerous creatures. Of course, he will not do this alone; Medea will be on hand to assist him with her witchy spells and concoctions.<sup>151</sup> Before they do face the earthborn men, fire-breathing bulls, and the serpent guardian of the Fleece, Jason questions Medea as to why her father wanted him to face these monsters: *dic, pater ille tuus tantis me opponere monstris / quid meritum aut tales uoluit <cur> pendere poenas* (7.420-1).<sup>152</sup> Jason does not understand why Aeetes should have wanted to put him through such trials, whereas Medea cannot understand why he did not simply do so earlier. In viewing their contrasting comprehension of the situation, it is clear that Medea understands monsters and their uses in a much clearer way than Jason.

Medea's sense of shame is again tested as she begs Jason to try and deal with the situation on his own (7.452-5). However, it is not to be: *cum gemitu et multo*

<sup>149</sup> OLD 1b, 7. The cognate *iungere* was used in connected with monsters at 6.436-8.

<sup>150</sup> Stadler (1993, 134) sees this repetition as 'pathetische Geminatio'. See above on the 'emphatic *ipse*'.

<sup>151</sup> See Fantuzzi (2008) on the narrative roles of Apollonius' Medea as 'a sorceress in love'.

<sup>152</sup> Stadler (1993, 169) sees 'bitter irony' in these lines; Perutelli (1997, 367-8) sees a sense of 'sarcasm' in Jason's rhetorical question.

*iuueni medicamina fletu / non secus ac patriam pariter famamque decusque / obicit* ('with a groan and many tears, she hands over the preparations to the young man, not unlike her fatherland, and fame, and dignity', 7.458-60).<sup>153</sup> In fact, in doing this Medea will achieve a new kind of *fama*, that which is associated with monsters, and has been throughout this epic. For his part, the unknowing Jason *ille manu subit et uim corripit omnem* ('reaches forth with his hand and grabs all their potency', 7.460). He has unwittingly entered into a future with Medea which guarantees his suffering, and she has submitted to her monstrosity. Rather than continuing to try and use her monstrous behaviour as a defence, and something which might repel the machinations of the gods to assuage her fate, in the end Medea has no choice but to submit to her inevitably monstrous future. She is finally depicted as being in the thrall of the Furies as she sets about casting her spells over Jason (7.461-5),<sup>154</sup> and as he reassures Medea that he will never leave her, the Furies note his words for the future, when he will go back on them (7.509-10). The final use of the word *monstra* appears as the pair finally reach Mars' grove, and are in snatching distance of the Fleece. Medea turns to 'show the hero what monsters remained' (*utque virum doceat, quae monstra supersint*, 7.522).<sup>155</sup> Since she will help him defeat this creature, the bulls, and the earthborn men, surely the only monster for Jason to face alone is in fact Medea herself.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>153</sup> 'Valerius Flaccus sposta tutta l'attenzione sul senso di colpa di Medea, ampliando al massimo le manifestazioni emotive esterne e interne della fanciulla', (Perutelli 1997, 384).

<sup>154</sup> Spaltenstein (2005, 329) sees Virgil's Dido (*Aen.* 4.169f) in these lines.

<sup>155</sup> Stadler (1993, 198) sees *monstra* as a poetic plural; Spaltenstein (2005, 345-6) agrees.

<sup>156</sup> See Newman (2008, 416) on Medea assuming 'the role of the serpent enemy' in Euripides' *Medea* and in art.

### 5.7 Medea, Monsters and the Muses

We turn now to examine a final facet of Medea's transgressive nature, and one which ultimately may enable the character to move beyond the boundaries of the poem itself, and to become the driver of its progress. This is achieved by linking her with the Muses. Monstrous characters themselves, Medea's links to them show her to be a hybrid of deity and mortal, a dangerous combination. Medea's ocular behaviour, which has thus far revealed her to be monstrous, and her witchy characteristics, which show her to have dangerous links to the occult, will now be fully underlined by this behaviour as human-muse. This is developed when we see the Muses' involvement in narrating the death of Tiphys, and the subsequent selection of Erginus as his replacement, when Apollo (perhaps, the Sun?) cannot (or will not) save Tiphys. The helmsman is an important metapoetic character, in that he drives the ship forward and thus the plot along with it. It is therefore significant that Medea shares the spotlight with Erginus in his final scene, sitting behind him in the poop, showing that she is in a position of power and influence. In causing the ship to move, we may read Medea as fulfilling the role of Muse, loitering somewhere between human and divine. She therefore overpowers the poet and feminizes him,<sup>157</sup> showcasing further the masculine qualities she has already demonstrated in reflecting the peculiar ocular behaviour of the male monsters met by the Argonauts on their journey. Indeed, the masculine Medea we see in Euripides<sup>158</sup> begins to assert her masculinity in Valerius' poem, ultimately threatening to remove responsibility for the progression of the story from the hands of the poet. This Medea shows the potential to transgress the boundaries of the story in which she is contained, and the

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<sup>157</sup> See Fowler (2002, 159) on the Muses' inspiration as a source of power, and the resultant loss of self-control 'essential to ancient masculinity'.

<sup>158</sup> Bongie (1977).

possibility that she might take the reins herself is constantly in the foreground. When the boundaries of her gender, her very being and nature cannot hold her, we can hardly expect that the poem itself will be up to the task.

Valerius needs to invoke the Muse (5.217-9) so that he might be able to deal with Medea's introduction. However, despite this call for inspiration, he then chooses to delay her direct involvement in the text for over one hundred lines. In that time he completes the back-story, but perhaps he also prepares himself and the audience for what is about to happen. The second invocation is inevitably linked with the first,<sup>159</sup> in which the Muses are not required. Instead, the poet calls upon Apollo, in the guise of the sun-god: *Phoebe mone* (1.5).<sup>160</sup> Despite not being mentioned in the opening proem (as indeed Jason is omitted), a hint to her may be discernible since Medea is descended from the Sun. Furthermore, the etymological intrigue in the connections between the verb *moneo* and the noun *monstrum* may be activated when we read the first proem retrospectively, since monsters play such a significant role in this text. Monsters, eyes, and vision are repeatedly linked throughout, and the sun is a highly visible and visual entity, which can see all and is seen by everyone. When Medea is finally introduced into the text by way of the invocation to the Muses, Apollo makes another appearance.<sup>161</sup>

Immediately prior to Medea's introduction in book 5, the Argonauts face a series of disasters which make a huge impact upon them, and which contribute to the significance of Medea's involvement thereafter. In a prophecy given in return for

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<sup>159</sup> Zissos (2004b, 315) points out that whereas Apollonius links the proems in books 1 and 3 by way of the Fleece, Valerius' proems are linked by the omission of the Fleece.

<sup>160</sup> As discussed above.

<sup>161</sup> Note that Apollo's only active intervention takes place at 4.58-81, where he appeals to Jupiter to allow Hercules to free Prometheus. Jupiter grants the request, and Prometheus is freed in book 5 (154-76). On Apollo's intervention, see Murgatroyd (2007b).

removing the threat of the Harpies,<sup>162</sup> Phineus foretold that the seer Idmon would die. He is lost to plague (5.1-12), and soon the helmsman Tiphys is also dying (5.15). While the crew has within its number another seer in Mopsus, there is not another helmsman.<sup>163</sup> The death of such a crucial crew-member is a huge loss to the Argonauts, who begin to pray to Apollo as one voice for Tiphys' revival:

*“arquipotens aduerte, precor, nunc denique, Apollo!”<sup>164</sup>*  
*hoc, pater, hoc nobis refoue caput, ulla laboris*  
*si nostri te cura mouet, qui cardine summo*  
*uertitur atque omnis manibus nunc pendet ab unis.”*

(“Look to us, we pray, Apollo, now at last, O wielder of the bow! This head, father, this life revive for us, if concern for our enterprise which is at its supreme turning-point, ever moves you; everything now hangs in the hands of one alone.”, 5.17-20).<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> The Harpies are referred to as ‘monsters’ twice in the text; at both times, Phineus is the speaker: *diripiunt uerruntque dapes foedataque turbant / pocula, saeuit odor surgitque miserrima pugna / parque mihi monstisque fames*. (“They tear into pieces and carry off the feasts and overturn the befouled cups; there is a vile odour and a most miserable battle arises, as the monsters are equally famished as me.” 4.454-6), and *nempe adsunt qui monstra fugent, Aquilonia proles / non externa mihi* (“surely the sons of Aquila are here to drive off the monsters, nor are they foreign to me”, 4.462-3). On these, see Spaltenstein (2005, ad loc.) and Murgatroyd (2009, ad loc.), with the latter commenting that *monstris* at 4.456 is particularly ‘emotive’, and identifying a link with Propertius 1.20.25 in *monstra fugent* at 4.462. On Prop. 1.20, see Cairns (2006, ch. 7). Celaeno declares: *Furiarum ego maxima* (Aen. 3.252).

<sup>163</sup> See Hardie (1993, 110-6) for issues and poetics of succession. On the death of Tiphys and its connection to technology, see Davis (2010, 2-3).

<sup>164</sup> Apollo sends the plague by means of his bow at *Il.* 1.43-52. Håkanson (1969, 138-9) argues the word ‘Apollo’ is not used of the sun-god in Latin. However Jason’s call to the god is presumably not so discerning; he is appealing to Apollo in his guise as healer-god.

<sup>165</sup> See Fowler (1997, 21) on this as potential mid-point of the poem, and the significance of it.

Despite their pleas, the words are not heard by the god (5.21), and in a powerful simile, the Argonauts are likened to small children weeping over their dying father (5.22-6).<sup>166</sup> It is not surprising that the Argonauts' prayers go unheeded,<sup>167</sup> for perhaps it is still possible to link Apollo's rejection of the plea to his connection to the sun-god, and thus, to Colchis. Sol is introduced by these words: *sed non et Scythici genitor discrimine nati / intrepidus tales fundit Sol pectore uoces* ('But not undaunted [by the plight?] of his Scythian child, Father Sol pours out words such as these from his breast,' 1.503-4), before voicing his concerns to Jupiter over the Argonautic mission. Thus the very last god from whom the Argonauts can expect to receive help is likely to be one connected in some way to the Sun.

Jason perceives the loss of Tiphys to be a 'supreme turning point' (*cardine summo uertitur*, 5.19-20) in their journey, and a discussion of who will be the lost helmsman's successor ensues (5.63-72). Ancaeus and Nauplius make a joint request for the post, but Erginus takes over: *Erginum fato uocat ipsa monenti / quercus et ad tonsas uicti rediere magistri*. ('The oak itself calls for Erginus on Fate's advice, and the defeated masters returned to the oars', 5.65-6).<sup>168</sup> It is clear that the helmsman, being in the 'driving seat' when steering the ship, is also a driving force in the poem: if the ship cannot travel onward, the story cannot either.<sup>169</sup> What is intriguing is that the loss of Tiphys, and the instatement of Erginus, is connected with Medea in two

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<sup>166</sup> The significance of the loss of a helmsman is a repeated trope in earlier literature; see for example *Od.* 10.551-60, *AR* 2.851-98, and *Aen.* 5.838-71. The latter account owes much to both stories (see Nelis 2001, *passim*, but especially 221-3). The Valerian Argonauts' meeting with Phineus and the Harpies occurs just before Tiphys dies (4.433-636).

<sup>167</sup> To further emphasise the scale of the loss, after the funeral Valerius says (5.33-4): *tunc ipsa cremari / uisa ratis medioque uiros deponere ponto* ('then it seemed the ship itself was being burned, and stranding the heroes in the mid-sea'). Statius compares the devastating effect of the loss of the *uates* Amphiarus on the Argives to Tiphys' death on the Argonauts (*Theb.* 8.212-14). For more on the links between Statius and the Argonauts, see Stover (2009b, particularly 448-9).

<sup>168</sup> The corresponding scene in Apollonius (2.851-98) is quite different. There, the Argonauts have the final say; here, mysteriously, the *Argo* itself seems to choose Erginus.

<sup>169</sup> See Herschkowitz (1998b, 8) on the metapoetics of the death of Tiphys.

clear ways. The first has already been discussed briefly in chapter 1.2, but in the present context, it bears further examination.

The first connection comes as Erginus makes his only other appearance in the poem, despite his critical role as helmsman. He recommends that the ship should navigate the river Danube on the return journey, rather than negotiating the Clashing Rocks once again (8.178-94). Erginus' role here is pivotal, indeed another 'supreme turning point': if it were not for his instructions upon leaving Colchis, the Argonauts would never have visited Peuce, and thus Jason and Medea's wedding could not have taken place there. Jason acknowledges Erginus' importance, calling him *fidissime rector* (8.197), and takes his advice. Intriguingly, Medea now makes her presence felt. Immediately after Erginus' instructions, we are told of her location on the *Argo* as it speeds away from Colchis, and it is highly significant:

*Puppe procul summa uigilis post terga magistri  
haeserat auratae genibus Medea Mineruae*

(‘Far away on the high poop behind the vigilant steersman  
Medea clung to the knees of Minerva’s gilded image’, 8.202-  
3).<sup>170</sup>

At this point in the story Medea may be isolated, frightened and separate from the majority of the Argonauts (including her husband-to-be), but she is sitting in a place

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<sup>170</sup> On this scene in Apollonius, see Phinney (1967, 329). Orpheus, the great story-teller, is also sat high in the poop when he begins his stories to soothe the Argonauts as they leave Hercules behind: *Thracius at summa sociis e puppe sacerdos* [...] *carmen* (4.85-7) Murgatroyd (2009, 70) points out that ‘Orpheus will be standing on the poop to get the crew’s attention and to ensure maximum audibility and visibility (cf. Arion at Hdt. 1.24.4). VF thus gives the wise Orpheus a fitting elevation on a natural ‘stage’ and is more specific than AR, who never explains where Orpheus is when he sings on the *Argo*.’ Both Orpheus and Medea therefore are occupying positions of power and fulfilling the role of story-teller: see below.

of influence in the *Argo*, and at a height, where, importantly, she is able to view everything which is happening:<sup>171</sup> and for Medea, being able to see and be seen is crucial. Importantly, she is also behind the man who, on a metapoetic level, might be seen to control the story. Medea therefore is also in a powerful metapoetic position, behind the helmsman. The death of Tiphys occurring just before the introduction of Medea is therefore linked. By book 8, Medea's power over the direction of the story is both internal and external; without a helmsman, the ship (and thus the story) cannot progress. It is significant that Medea is introduced just as Erginus is chosen by the *Argo* itself to take the role of helmsman, and then to be shown sitting behind him in his only other scene.

The invocation of the Muse which introduces the section of the story also bears further scrutiny:<sup>172</sup>

*Incipe nunc cantus alios, dea, uisaeque uobis*

*Thessalici da bella ducis. non mens mihi, non haec*

*ora satis.*

(‘Goddess, now begin other songs, and give us the wars of the Thessalian leader seen by you; I haven’t the faculty, these utterances aren’t sufficient’, 5.217-9).<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Medea is represented as appearing at height at the close of Euripides’ *Medea*.

<sup>172</sup> See above, and also Wijsman (1996, 122-4.) and Zissos (2004d, 313-4) on the intended length of the work. For a general study of ‘proems in the middle’, see Conte (1992), who suggests that programmatic passages often occur at central points in Roman texts. See also Kyriakidis and Martino’s edited volume (2004).

<sup>173</sup> Zissos (2004d, 316) recognises Valerius’ ‘indebtedness’ to Apollonius in terms of structure, but also an ‘important departure on the programmatic level’.



Only a short time prior to this, we saw Jason and the Argonauts pray to Apollo – the healer god, the god connected with poetry, the deity connected to the Sun – to save the *Argo*’s first helmsman Tiphys, without success; Valerius must now exhort the Muse to assist him in introducing Medea to the story. In Apollonius’ *Argonautica* (3.1-4), the Muse Erato is invoked to introduce the Colchian.<sup>174</sup> Erato is traditionally associated with love, and thus she is a fitting deity to be called upon for help to narrate a story involving ‘love’; in addition, there too the second proem is the marker to the second half of his poem, and for a new and important theme.<sup>175</sup> As we have seen, Valerius does not mention Erato or the Muse of Love at all in his own second proem, but the fact it is an invocation of a singular divinity allows one to ponder which Muse it might be. This omission arguably makes the reader reassess how Medea’s character is going to be treated, in the same way the inclusion of Erato did for Apollonius and for Virgil. It has been suggested that this ‘makes an important departure on the programmatic level by announcing a switch to depravity and horror rather than erotics’.<sup>176</sup> ‘Depravity and horror’ may indeed be the order of the day here, if these are to be the actions of monsters, so carefully layered and brought into the poem by Valerius. Immediately after the invocation of the Muse, an as yet unnamed Medea is immediately linked to monsters:<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> See also *Musa, mone*, (6.34), where Valerius needs assistance in narrating the battle between the Argonauts and the Scythians. This battle, waged under the pretence that the Argonauts’ reward for the involvement will be the Fleece, is futile, and this sentiment is succinctly expressed later: *ignotis quid opus concurrere nec quos oderis?* (‘What need is there to fight with strangers whom you do not hate?’ 6.25-6). This transgressive battle is watched by Medea, under the guidance of Juno in disguise. See above for monstrous connotations of this.

<sup>175</sup> Virgil takes influence from Apollonius when including a second proem in the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 7.37-45). See Nelis (2001, 268) on the erotic nature of Virgil’s wars. For Zissos (2004d, 317) ‘the *Aeneid* stands as a crucial mediating term between the two Argonautic epics’.

<sup>176</sup> Zissos (2005, 209).

<sup>177</sup> See above.

*uentum ad furias infandaque natae*  
*foedera et horrenda trepidam sub uirgine puppem;*  
*impia **monstriferis** surgunt iam proelia campis.*

(‘We are come to the violent passions and unutterable treaty  
of the girl, and how the vessel shuddered beneath the dreadful  
maid. The impious battles rise up from the monster-bearing  
fields’, 5.219-21).<sup>178</sup>

In *impia...proelia* there may be a reference to future civil wars, or perhaps to the battles between Medea’s father and Jason, with which Medea assists the Argonauts by using her witchy power.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, there is a metapoetic facet in the insinuation that the *Argo* will ‘shudder beneath’ Medea:<sup>180</sup> *trepidam*, whilst having associations with fear, can also represent physical movement (*OLD* 4).<sup>181</sup> If this is the force used here, then Medea’s influence on the ship is not only like an epiphany, and thus almost divine in nature, but will somehow influence the ship to move.<sup>182</sup> Medea is the new driving force behind the ship, and is playing the role of Muse<sup>183</sup> and of quasi-helmsman, introduced just as Tiphys succumbs to plague, and also appearing in proximity to Erginus as he directs the *Argo* towards the location of her marriage.

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<sup>178</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 198) argues that the words immediately following this (*ante dolos, ante infidi tamen exsequar astus* | *Soligenae falli meriti meritique relinqui* (‘Nevertheless, before that, I should pursue the deceits and tricks of the unworthy offspring of the Sun, deserving to be deceived, deserving to be abandoned’, 5.222-3), constitute ‘Another example, and one which is marked out by the narrator as being a digression [that the epic’s new subject matter will be Jason’s battles and Medea’s love madness]’.

<sup>179</sup> Zissos (2004d, 316) suggests that in these words there may even be a suggestion of Medea’s murderous nature in later life.

<sup>180</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 10).

<sup>181</sup> See Gibson (2006, ad loc.) on Statius’ use of *trepidamque* at *Siluae* 5.3.9;

<sup>182</sup> Note also that at *Il.* 5.837-9 and *Theb.* 7.750, divinities are described as being ‘weighty’.

<sup>183</sup> Spentzou (2002, 93) sees Apollonius’ Medea as Human-Muse in AR 3.

Medea's status as human continues to become confused as the text progresses, and she begins to show an affinity with other deities in the story. Juno and Venus have appeared in disguise to the maiden, but Medea managed to literally 'see through' them both.<sup>184</sup> Medea challenges divine involvement in Jason's progress as the monsters alluded to in the second proem with the words *monstriferis campis* (5.21) loom into view. As Jason and Medea plot how they will defeat the fire-breathing bulls, an assertive Medea gives voice to her sense of confidence, and acknowledges that she is no longer recognisable as the girl she once was:

*Iuno ubi nunc, ubi nunc Tritonia uirgo  
sola tibi quoniam tantis in casibus adsum  
externae regina domus, miraris et ipse,  
credo, nec agnoscunt haec nunc Aeetida silvae.*<sup>185</sup>

(‘Where is Juno now, where now is the Tritonian maiden, seeing that I alone am present for you in such misfortune, the princess of a foreign land? You wonder it yourself too, I believe; nor do these woods recognise me now as Aeetes’ daughter’, 7.442-5).

Medea, whose strength has been recognised by both Juno and Venus, now sees herself as a substitute for the goddesses who have helped Jason on his journey.<sup>186</sup> Her hesitation is now behind her, and she has transcended the role of exploited bystander,

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<sup>184</sup> As discussed above.

<sup>185</sup> cf. Sen. *Med.* 1021: ‘*coniugem agnoscis tuam*’.

<sup>186</sup> Hershkowitz (1998b, 54). Medea is ‘the spirit of vengeance’ at Eur. *Med.* 1332-3 (see Boedeker 1997).

or maiden hopelessly in love with the warrior. She is now fulfilling the role of patron goddess, which adds to that of quasi-helmsman, and Muse-like figure. By the time she comes to fight the monsters which Jason can defeat only with her help, she is compared not only to Cybele, but also to Bellona:

*qualis ubi attonitos maestae Phrygas annua Matris  
ira uel exectos lacerat Bellona Comanos,  
haud secus accensas subito Medea cohortes  
implicat et miseros agit in sua proelia fratres.*

(‘Just as when the yearly anger of the mournful mother cuts the Phrygians, or Bellona lacerates the Comanes, in such a way does Medea suddenly involve the burning cohorts, and drive the wretched brothers into battle against their own’, 7.635-8).

The Argonauts themselves then recognise Medea as a Fury, as they ponder the wider implications of their actions by discussing strife between Europe and Asia:

*quemque suas sinat ire domos nec Marte cruento  
Europam atque Asiam prima haec committat Erinys.  
namque datum hoc fatis trepidus supplexque canebat  
Mopsus, ut in seros irent magis ista nepotes,  
atque alius lueret tam dira incendia raptor.*

(‘whoever he may be, let him suffer each to go home, nor let this Fury first commit Europe Asia in cruel war. For this was what the fates decreed, as Mopsus sang in supplication and fear, that rather the quarrel should pass to their later offspring and another ravisher avert such a dire a conflagration’, 8.395-9).

Medea is emerging as a hybrid in terms of the role she plays in this text. She is inspiration for the plot to continue; she is closely associated with the one who pilots the ship; she is more powerful than the deities who brought Jason to Colchis in the first place. All of these factors augment and complement the monstrous behaviour she has displayed so far. She transgresses the boundaries of the poem itself by behaving as Muse and as the helmsman, thus metapoetically driving forward the poem, and simultaneously acting as the inspiration for that same poem.<sup>187</sup>

The Muses are problematic entities: they describe themselves in their famous self-classifying account in Hesiod (*Theog.* 27-8) as creatures that can spread truth as well as lies.<sup>188</sup> Direct contact between human and Muse was considered dangerous; hence the poet usually behaves as a conduit between the two.<sup>189</sup> The dangers of song in itself are also clear; for example, the Sirens’<sup>190</sup> song stupefies and, eventually, by

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<sup>187</sup> See O’Higgins (1997) on Medea as Muse in Pindar’s 4th *Pythian* Ode, and Spentzou (2002b) on Medea as Muse in Apollonius. See Sharrock (2002a) on Ovid’s battles with the Muse.

<sup>188</sup> See Spentzou (2002a, 1-10). In some respects they resemble Fama, a monstrous creature in herself. This all-seeing ability gives Fama special privilege over the world, and highlights the importance, but also perhaps the problems, of being able to see everything, all at once. Ovid sums up Rumour’s appetite for interfering: *ipsa, quid in caelo rerum pelagoque geratur / et tellure, videt totumque inquit in orbem*. (‘Rumour herself sees everything that happens in the heavens, throughout the ocean, and on land, and inquires about everything on earth’, *Ov. Met.* 12.62-3). Notice the use of the emphatic *ipsa* here once again (see above). See also Laird (2002) and Murray (2002) on the status and nature of the Muses.

<sup>189</sup> O’Higgins (1997, 110); she argues that mortal women who act like Muses, ‘that is, fixing their gaze on something beautiful or desirable and forget[ting] everything else’ bring disaster (*ibid.*, 111).

<sup>190</sup> See *Od.* 12; cf. Thamyras and the Muses (*Il.* 2.594-600).

way of death and decay of the body, strips the individual of identity.<sup>191</sup> For Medea to be acting almost as *both* poet and Muse, she is acting on a level which should be too dangerous to handle. However, with her witchy qualities and skills with incantations, she appears to be able to successfully deflect such threats. Her own monstrous nature has also made this possible, as shown by her repeated stupefaction and monstrous gaze.<sup>192</sup>

There are also convoluted gender implications of Medea's mixed roles here. Her stress on the importance of oaths (Eur. *Med.* 492-5) shows the older Medea to hold masculine sensibilities in later life; such declarations as her preference for battle rather than childbirth also bear this out (Eur. *Med.* 250-1). Similarly, the younger, Valerian Medea's peculiar ocular behaviour also reveals a transgression of genders: it reflects not only the eye-rolling of those affected by monsters from earlier literature (such as Amata or Dido), but also that of the male monsters (i.e. the creature at Sigeum and Amycus) encountered during the Argonautic quest. There are gender implications in her Muse-like role, too. While the Muses are traditionally female, the inspiration they provide has been interpreted as a source of power; 'a masculine, semen-like force' which brings about verse.<sup>193</sup> The flip-side to this is the nature of the delivery of that power, which subjugates and penetrates the poet, emasculating him and leaving him in the female subject position.<sup>194</sup> Arguably, there is an implicit transgression of gender taking place whenever the poet asks for help from the Muse; however for the Muse to be usurped by a character from the very poem which she is supposed to be inspiring, and a character who already has a confusing status of gender, complicates the picture substantially. A further

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<sup>191</sup> See Walsh (1984) on the dangers of song. The victims of Amycus are described as being stripped of their identity; see above.

<sup>192</sup> See Barton (1993) on the reflexivity of the monstrous gaze.

<sup>193</sup> Fowler (2002, 159).

<sup>194</sup> Fowler (2002, 159).

consideration is that heroic tales of monster-slaying in antiquity have been interpreted as the need for the male to overcome the female.<sup>195</sup> If in the end the discourse of monsters is a gendered one, with men being the great bringers of order and females being defeated, then this story does not fit the mould. Even in its incomplete state, Valerius' *Argonautica* does not comply with the idea of men bringing order to a female-gendered chaos. Medea emerges as a powerful figure, a composite of many differing sorts of monstrous creature, and is able to manage her hybrid status while staying on course for her tragic, and monstrous, destiny.

Medea's murderous future can only occur if she first marries Jason, and as such, their wedding is the event upon which the whole of Medea's future now hangs. There is no evidence in the *Argonautica* that the cave wedding-venue was ever the home to a monster. However its status is by no means clear-cut: it is somehow simultaneously the place in which the nymph Peuce was raped by the river Hister, and paradoxically also a feature of the island into which she morphs, perhaps as a result of this attack.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, while to all intents and purposes the cave offers a suitable setting for the nuptials, it is also a place with a confused status, a dangerous place *in* which, and *to* which, significant changes have occurred. Arguably, these descriptions also suit the story and characters in it, and importantly, the word *monstrum* with all its ambiguities maps well onto the cave scenario. Apollonius' Medea goes on to defeat the monster Talos (AR 4.1662-72), once Jason and Medea are safely away from Colchis.<sup>197</sup> To do so, Medea uses 'the evil eye'<sup>198</sup>, *invidia* in

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<sup>195</sup> Felton (2012, 108-9) points out that the myths of Hercules, Perseus, and Odysseus all involve males overcoming females: 'the male must overcome the female and various representatives of her chthonic origins; and the male must control nature and replace disorder with order, chaos with culture'. (Felton *ibid.*, 122).

<sup>196</sup> See previous chapters.

<sup>197</sup> On this, Lovatt (forthcoming) discusses the intrusion of the female, and the narrator 'denying his own epic authority'.

<sup>198</sup> See Hunter (1993, 119-29), Barton (1993, 94) and Lovatt (forthcoming, plus bibliography) on 'looking aslant' and the evil eye.

Latin.<sup>199</sup> In this word, the English ‘envy’ finds its root, and a textual hint to this concept was surely made when the Colchians are described as *inuisi genus* [...] *Phoebe* (6.468). In response to the outrage she feels at her husband’s own transgression,<sup>200</sup> Medea will eventually become a transgressor herself, killing her own children.<sup>201</sup> For her to be abandoned is intolerable, for she believes that outsiders will perceive her to have been weakened by her husband’s rejection of her (for example: Eur. *Med.* 277-9). However, keeping up appearances is also Jason’s primary concern: he too is anxious over how he (and his children) will appear to others, having married a non-Greek woman; thus he seeks to rectify this by choosing a new, and local, wife (Eur. *Med.* 555-65). How each character’s behaviour and status will be perceived and processed both by those around them in their city and by external onlookers is what they both base their actions upon. In his own eyes, Jason needs to marry an indigenous Greek woman to remove the stigma of his marrying a foreigner; Medea, on the other hand, holds fast to the vows both she and her husband took on the occasion of their marriage, and is wholly indignant (to say the least) that he now feels able to renege on them. *Invidia* overtakes Medea at this point, and fear of her loss of status drives her to carry out a monstrous act.<sup>202</sup>

In Valerius’ *Argonautica*, Medea is heading unstoppably towards her Euripidean destiny. In the tragic play, an account of Medea’s later life, her behaviour is characterised as both masculine and monstrous. Valerius’ Medea takes this monstrous behaviour to new levels, in building up the character to her tragic future. She shares intriguing ocular characteristics with male monsters which the Argonauts

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<sup>199</sup> *Invidia* is etymologically related to *uidere* (‘to see’). *Invidia* is ‘evil eye incarnate’ in Ovid’s *Met.* 2.752-801; on this see Feeney (1991, 243-7), Keith (1992, 117-34), Hardie (2002b, 236-8), and Lovatt (forthcoming).

<sup>200</sup> The *Medeas* of Euripides and Seneca deal with the fallout from this in detail.

<sup>201</sup> Monaghan (2005, 24) on how Valerius ‘resists the teleological drive of epic suggested by Virgil and leaves open the possibility that *this* Medea will *not* kill her children’.

<sup>202</sup> ‘Envy is a monster; envy is civil war’ (Barton 1993, 95). On the connections between *Fama* and *Invidia*, see Hardie (2002, 236-8).



meet on their journey, and manages to actively deflect the monstrous attacks of two goddesses for substantial periods of time. The Romans understood the ominous links between eyes and monsters, and these are enhanced in the Valerian Medea when she is stupefied at Jason's appearance, and when she partakes in a lengthy teichoscopia scene where she watches a battle only hinted at in earlier versions of the Argonautic myth. Finally, Medea assumes powers which not only make gods nervous, but also usurp the narrator himself, thus compromising his masculinity whilst drawing upon her own masculine tendencies. As a hybrid creature – a blend of mortal and divine, able to control the narrative, monstrous in behaviour and similarity to creatures such as Fama – Valerius' Medea is transgressive and controversial, moving outside the boundaries of the poem she is supposed to be within. She is as difficult to pin down as the word *monstrum* itself,<sup>203</sup> and as she moves through the poem, she seals her monstrous nature by marrying in a location which could be home to a monster, thus setting in motion one of the most famous and harrowing transgressive events she will undertake: the murder of her children.

It is difficult to know how Valerius would have ended the poem; in fact, perhaps the question should be recast, and we should rather think about how the transgressive Medea would have ended it. What we have in his unfinished work is the wedding on Peuce, a scene to which all roads lead, the transgressive nature of which is highlighted in the concatenation of several transgressive elements. There is no better place for Medea's future actions to truly manifest themselves; Valerius' world of (re)moveable boundaries leaves the way clear for the monstrous Medea to move freely from the restricted world of the poem into the free world of composing it.

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<sup>203</sup> For Spentzou (2002, 93), the Apollonian Medea 'eludes definitive circumscription'.

## 6: Science Fiction receptions of the Argonautic myth

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the *Argonautica* contains many transgressive themes, which question a number of issues, such as the expected roles, capabilities, and identity of characters, and even the role of the landscape in which the poem is set. All of these transgressive elements, when taken together, prompt the reader to assess the effect of their inclusion. It is time to turn our attention to a different approach, to discover a new way to think about the poem's transgressive nature. The use of Argonautic themes and imagery may have been considered hackneyed in antiquity, but they have nonetheless persisted in popularity to be used in works of modern literature. Indeed it is the use of Argonautic themes, imagery, and ideas in modern science fiction literature which is the focus of this section. In investigating such uses of Argonautic imagery, a new way to read Valerius' *Argonautica* begins to emerge, and one which clearly interrogates its transgressive nature. The *Argo*'s status as first ship in the *Argonautica* immediately sets it out as transgressive, and also brings into the foreground the value (or perhaps disadvantages, as a transgressive vessel) of it as a piece of new technology. Technology and its uses are a focus of the science fiction genre, and in thinking about the ways in which the Argonauts are 'used' in science fiction, we can begin to question the magnitude and longevity of the transgressive acts which the launching of the first ship (and technological breakthrough) the *Argo* sets in motion. Finally, we can begin to think about whether, when attempting to historicise the poem, we should be wary about seeing a clear-cut ideological standpoint, and a positive one at that. Valerius' world is one of confusion when viewed against its myriad of collapsed boundaries, and the reception of Argonautic themes in science fiction in fact lead us

to begin to consider the *Argo* as something of a harbinger of negativity. When reading the poem against the chain of science fiction receptions which repeatedly offer warnings of doom through the use of Argonautic imagery, a less than rosy picture begins to emerge from Valerius' work.<sup>638</sup>

Quite apart from the transgressive aspects of the text explored in previous chapters, in many ways the whole Argonautic saga is underscored by transgression. Whereas the Greeks saw the *Argo* as a famous ship, and a fast ship, and undoubtedly an important vessel, the Romans presented it as the first ship to ever exist.<sup>639</sup> Thus, in line with many Roman presentations of the myth, the primacy of the *Argo* is a prominent feature of Valerius' text. For the Romans, the maiden voyage of the first ship in existence was seen as a pivotal moment in human history: as a technological and social development, it brought with it the Iron Age, whilst simultaneously sweeping away the Golden Age.<sup>640</sup> It also brought contact with new races, the possibility of trade, and the threat of war. As Valerius came to compose his version of the Argonautic myth, he could choose to either contribute to, or deviate from, this tradition among Roman writers. As a major contribution to the technological world, the *Argo* brings to the fore issues such as the consequences of the end of a primitive age, and the beginning of a new era.<sup>641</sup>

In order to produce his own version of the myth, Valerius had to carefully navigate through all of the preceding versions, just as the *Argo* navigates the seas.

The inherent paradox here is that although the Romans saw the *Argo*'s journey as the

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<sup>638</sup> M. Davis (1990, 48), who believes that 'Valerius employed *Argo* to serve as central image of the conflict between positive and negative views of Rome's development'; the transgressive nature of Valerius' poem seems to support this conclusion. See also Zissos (2006b) and Stover (2012), both of which will be discussed below.

<sup>639</sup> See Jackson (1997) on the *Argo* as first ship.

<sup>640</sup> On the *Argo* as boundary-breaker, see Feeney (1991, 330-5), Hardie (1993, 83-6), and Feeney (2007, ch. 4).

<sup>641</sup> On technological progress at the start of the poem as having an impact on what happens to Jason in Colchis, see P. Davis (2010, 1-13). On technology and boundary disputes in the Roman Empire, see Cuomo (2007, 103-130).

first ever to be undertaken at sea by a man-made sea-going vessel, the popularity of versions of the myth in antiquity led to accusations of the story being hackneyed.<sup>642</sup> Therefore with each new version of the story which told the tale of the ‘first ship’ to appear, a new interpretation of that story was required. Valerius appears to make his position clear from the opening word of the poem, *prima*, meaning ‘first’. Following the Roman tradition, his work will showcase the *Argo* as the first ship to exist. This plot feature deviates from Apollonius’ earlier epic version, but is an extension of the Roman idea first anticipated in Catullus 64, Horace *Odes* 1.3 and Seneca’s *Medea*.<sup>643</sup> Seemingly following Seneca, Valerius then follows this with the idea of ‘daring’ (*ausa*, 1.3): to do something for the first time, such as build a ship and sail it across the sea, is a daring, and potentially transgressive, undertaking.<sup>644</sup> The two ideas are conflated elsewhere in Roman literature, with differing purposes and results: for example, Lucretius connects them when speaking of the first questions asked about the relevance of the old, traditional gods: *primum Graius homo mortalis tollere contra | est oculos ausus primusque obsistere contra* (‘It was a Greek man that first

<sup>642</sup> Virgil may hint at this when he asks *cui non dictus Hylas puer[?]* at G.3.6. See also Zissos (2004c) on Martial’s epigram 7.19, which Zissos reads as a criticism of the repeated use of Argonautic imagery, and particularly most likely in Valerius’ (then recently produced) work.

<sup>643</sup> Hershkowitz (1998, 36). See for example Cat. 64.6: *ausi sunt uada salsa cita decurrere puppi* and 64.11: *illa rudem cursu prima imbuat Amphitreten*; Hor. *Carm.* 1.3.10-12: *qui fragile truci | commisit pelago ratem | primus*; Sen. *Med.* (301-2): *audax nimium qui freta primus | ratem tam fragile perfida rupit*. M. Davis (1990, esp. 48-9) sees Valerius’ reinforcement of the first ship idea at 1.211-4 and 1.626-32 as confirmation of Valerius’ interest in Catullus, and believes that Valerius’ work also closely mirrors that of Seneca (ibid., 57-61). Malamud and McGuire (1993, 196) argue that: ‘by the time Valerius inherits it, the myth of the *Argo* has become a trope for the impossibility of discovering an origin; for Valerius it seems also to be a metaphor for the impossibility of creating a truly original text.’ Stover (2010, 645) takes a similar view. On inconsistency in Latin epic, see O’Hara (2007). On the myth as an allegory for the rejuvenation of Rome following Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, see Stover (2012).

<sup>644</sup> On the *Argo* as the ‘primal fault’, as signified by this word in such a prominent place, see M. Davis (1990) and Boyle (1991). On literary *audacia*, see Brink (1971, 92) and MacLeod (1977, 362; n. 14); on Livy’s claims of the lack of literary *audacia* in his work (since it is seen to be negative), see Moles (1993). In his treatise on poetry Horace argues that ‘artists and poets have always shared the right to dare anything’ (*Ars.* 9-10). Indeed, Horace believes that the Romans could do better when it comes to daring: *Nil intemptatum nostri liquere poetae, | nec minimum meruere decus uestigia Graeca | ausi deserere et celebrare domestica facta, | uel qui praetextas uel qui docuere togatas* (‘Our own poets have left nothing unexplored, And have not won least honour by daring to leave the paths of the Greeks and celebrate things at home, whether in Roman tragedies or domestic comedies’, *Ars.* 285-8). See also Ennius *Ann.* 216; Cat 1.5; Virgil *G.* 4.565, and Claudian *Rapt. Pros.* 1.3.

dared to raise human eyes in opposition and first to disapprove in opposition', *DRN* 1.66-7).<sup>645</sup> Seneca's *Medea* (301-2) also brings together firstness and daring in an Argonautic context, only this time with an explicit value judgement attached: *audax nimium qui freta primus / ratem tam fragile perfida rupit* ('too bold was he who first in a fragile ship broke through the treacherous straits'). The undercurrent of negativity in the connection between daring and firsts is clear here, and the pervading sense of transgression is also anticipated when reading Valerius' poem.

However, a closer reading of the *Argonautica* reveals a tension between the boundary-breaking exploits of the Argonauts, and the response of those entities which should find the enterprise transgressive in the first place: the gods. These confusing responses in the face of transgressive technology contribute yet further to the overarching confused nature of the subject of transgression in Valerius' work, as examined so far. For example, in a striking move Jupiter announces he will lift the barriers which stand in the way of the *Argo*'s journey (1.555-8), and thus appears to be facilitating a transgressive act.<sup>646</sup> A similar problem occurs when we attempt to evaluate Neptune's feelings on the expedition. Initially he appears offended, as we might expect, being as he is god of the sea: Mopsus sees his reaction as hostile in his prophecy (1.211-7). However, he goes on to save the Argonauts from the fierce storm in book 1 (1.640-2), thus appearing to undermine his earlier stance.<sup>647</sup> Neptune's response is far from clear-cut: he accompanies his actions in saving the *Argo* with the words: *veniant Phariae Tyriaeque carinae / permissumque putent* ('let

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<sup>645</sup> See Fowler (2002, 153-4).

<sup>646</sup> M. Davis (1990, 64) argues that 'this is a Jupiter who speaks ambiguously'. On the *Argo* as a force for legitimising sea travel, see Shelton (1974, 22), and on the *Argo* not being a threat to the gods, see Hershkowitz (1998b, 217).

<sup>647</sup> Zissos (2006b) reads this as an example of the 'dialogism' inherent in the text, arguing that in the storm scene 'Valerius' treatment cuts through the polarized and static positions of the progressivist-primitivist debate, leaving both ideologies neutralized and deflated in its wake [...] Valerius does not offer a positive alternative to the ideological positions he has so ruthlessly undermined.' (Ibid., 95).

ships come from Egypt and Phoenicia and think that they have permission to do so'), the implication being that what is happening is unlawful. Meanwhile, the north wind Boreas has earlier complained to Aeolus (1.598-607) that the *Argo* is permitted to sail because he cannot stop it without first gaining the approval of his senior. For M. Davis (1990, 64), this shows that 'that those who understand what should be done may not do it because persons higher up control their actions gives lawless persons confidence to transgress'. This confusion over the correct response to human action therefore leads to human's displaying the ability to step outside one's usual boundaries, and perhaps to the confusing response of both Jupiter and Neptune in the face of this transgression.

The picture is further muddled when contradictions to the *Argo*'s primal status itself arise in book 2, where Hypsipyle helps her father escape death at the Lemnian women's hands on a sea-going vessel (2.286-7).<sup>648</sup> Later, Cyzicus suggests to Jason that he fears the approach of another race across the sea; the city of the Doliones also possesses a harbour (2.655-8).<sup>649</sup> Both of these striking moments also pointedly contribute to the emerging picture of confusion where transgression is concerned. Where we might expect hostility, instead there is benignity; where we might expect barriers, they are removed. In the *Argo*, Valerius has presented a 'first' in a text preoccupied with 'firsts', or in undermining the impact of, and reaction to, this potentially transgressive situation. In showing the king of the gods' approval of the quest, he has negated the transgressive element, while paradoxically making the continued transgression *necessary* for the story to continue.

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<sup>648</sup> See Poortvliet (1991, *ad loc.*) on the Lemnian vessel as a 'raft' rather than a ship *per se*.

<sup>649</sup> Spaltenstein (2002, 484-5) argues that Valerius did not take into account the primacy of the *Argo* here.

Valerius therefore seems to develop something of a tension between the impact of this new technology and its potentially transgressive nature, particularly when viewed against earlier Roman literature which seeks to see such an enterprise in a negative light. The expected ideological viewpoint appears to be destabilised,<sup>650</sup> with its anticipated stance on the invention of navigation overturned. As with the role of monsters in the text and their status, and the complicated status of Peuce herself and the surrounding landscape, the impact of technology is difficult to pin down, with the ideology underpinning the presentation of the myth seeming to occupy a middle ground between a negative view of the end of a primitive time, and a positive view of progress.

In order to elucidate Valerius' complex views on the Argo as transgressive technology, we turn now to the ways in which the post-antique world has responded to the Argonautic myth, particularly concerning technology. The area of interest for this study is the sustained use of Argonautic imagery in several works of modern science fiction (or, SF), a use which can be dated to the very earliest contributions to that genre.<sup>651</sup> Argonautic themes are used in a number of ways by later science fiction writers as they explore transgression. Most often, Argonautic imagery appears in stories which are preoccupied with man's ambitions for progressivism (frequently through the use of new technology). Often these stories seek to demonstrate that such ambitions are misguided, and that ultimately these follies will lead to man's destruction. It turns out that the ramifications of Argonautic transgression for mankind which Valerius begins to introduce in the *Argonautica* reach much further

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<sup>650</sup> See Zissos (2006b), who argues that 'through the use of ambivalent rhetorical and figural constructions, the Flavian *Argonautica* simultaneously posits and exasperates the conventional paradigms of ethical judgement – namely, primitivism and progressivism – that inform the ancient literary debate.

<sup>651</sup> Rogers and Stevens (2012, 129) see 'the study of modern SF [...] as a site or sites for classical reception'.

than he may have thought. Furthermore, science fiction receptions of the Argonautic myth allow us to revisit Valerius' poem, and to reconsider it in the light of Argonautic themes explored in them. In doing so, the technological transgressions which Valerius places firmly into the foreground are highlighted, and we are forced once again to ponder the questions which Valerius is asking in considering transgression in this way.

### **6.1 Science Fiction – a very brief overview**

The story of the Argonautic quest has endured in popularity throughout the ages, and continues to do so today; as such, the reception of these themes beyond antiquity must be evaluated.<sup>652</sup> Science fiction stories are often connected with fantasy, and are concerned with exploring the potential and the unknown. Favoured subject matter can include travel to unknown worlds, travel through time, and the mysteries of space, all of which involve breaking boundaries in some way. Very often, the science fiction narratives which utilise Argonautic imagery do so precisely to explore transgressive themes such as these. That science fiction writers have utilised Argonautic imagery to augment and explore their own preoccupations with boundary transgression is not only interesting for scholars investigating science fiction itself. Such receptions may be reflected back onto the ancient works, to create new readings and interpretations of them in the light of later readings. The boundary-breaking, pioneering nature of the Argonauts is a trope which both the ancient poet and science fiction writers exploit and explore. The receptions of these specific aspects of the

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<sup>652</sup> On reception theory, see Eco (1992), Martindale (1993), Machor and Goldstein (2001), Hardwick (2003), and the edited volumes of Martindale and Thomas (2006) and Hardwick and Stray (2008).



Argonautic myth highlight the transgressive arena in which Valerius operates, and allows us to revisit Valerius' text with these interpretations in mind, to see if new readings of the ancient work might be generated.

The Valerian *Argo* strives for its place amongst the stars,<sup>653</sup> and by happy coincidence the genre of science fiction routinely deals with stars as one of its staple themes. Science fiction writers have used the genre to promote discussion on social issues, as well as to expand and explore the bounds of scientific breakthroughs (as well as those which remain, as yet, out of reach). The frequency of appearances of Argonautic themes in science fiction may stem from the idea of the technological primacy of the ship itself becoming, over a period of time, one of the most prominent and distinctive features of the Argonautic saga. This was, as we have seen, a feature 'fixed' by Roman writers. The Greeks did not see the *Argo* as the first ship; it may have been a fast ship, and an important one, but not the first to exist.<sup>654</sup> It is, of course, important to consider what the reading audience actually knows; the science fiction reader or filmgoer may not be able to judge the literal fidelity to their subject's forbears, and so may not know that the Greek versions were not concerned with primacy in the same way. However, rather than attempting to create a 'history' showing the 'provenance' of science fiction receptions of the Argonautic myth, the focus of this study will be to examine the receptions themselves, however they have been created, and to begin to think about how they then impact upon Valerius' version of the myth. Prior to embarking upon this discussion, it will first be useful to investigate and gain a better understanding of this much discussed genre. What follows is therefore a very brief survey of the most recent scholarship and theories pertaining to the genre. Once the framework has been set, the investigation will then

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<sup>653</sup> 1.4. See chapter 3.2 for more on constellations as monsters, transgressive entities.

<sup>654</sup> See above.

move on to explore the idea that the Argonautic myth is being largely recast as a story in the science fiction genre, and to consider the ramifications of that on Valerius' text.

It would be impossible to attempt here a full consideration of the genre of science fiction. As a relatively new genre,<sup>655</sup> it is increasingly gaining in stature in academic circles, with the fundamentals of it hotly debated by scholars across the world.<sup>656</sup> Pinning down what constitutes science fiction is 'no easy matter [...] the critical discourse is a divergent and contested field'.<sup>657</sup> Several theories have been put forward, with a number of book-length studies of the genre appearing in the last twenty years alone.<sup>658</sup> The ideas of travel narration, exploration, and technical innovation seem to permeate and drive the genre, though the potentially more general term 'speculative fiction' is also used for some literature; this 'umbrella' term covers utopian/dystopian narratives, horror, gothic, fantasy, and science-based works. Early interests in exploring unknown worlds (in an era when the world *had* been almost fully explored) and a constant need to travel were also early concerns of the genre.<sup>659</sup> A connection between the pursuit of progress and the development of technology are also present in the genre.<sup>660</sup> An interesting proposition for the focused essence of science fiction is the idea that certain works concentrate on the *novum*: '[a] fictional

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<sup>655</sup> Luckhurst (2005, 15) points out that the term itself only came into use in the 1920s, though the date of the first use of the phrase and the origin of the genre are not one and the same.

<sup>656</sup> Brown (2008, 416) sees science fiction as 'an elastic term'.

<sup>657</sup> Roberts (2006, 1). He discusses (ibid. 14) the concepts of τέχνη (negative; specific skills or abilities; associated from antiquity with the sophists) and ἐπιστήμη (positive; discoveries of the universe and science; open-ended and dialectal, associated with Plato and Aristotle). On τέχνη in classical Athens, see Cuomo (2007, 7-40). See also Slusser (2007) for a concise outline of the debate; he concludes that 'SF is all about science' (ibid., 28), and as such, those stories pertaining to science can be classed as belonging to the genre.

<sup>658</sup> See for example Suvin (1988), Parrinder (1995), Aldiss and Windgrove (2001), Luckhurst (2005), Roberts (2006), and Csicsery-Ronay (2008). Recent science fiction companion collections also provide an overview of the genre; see *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (ed. James and Mendlesohn, 2003), *A Companion to Science Fiction* (ed. Seed, 2005), and *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (eds. Bould, Butler, Roberts and Vint, 2009). See also *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (ed. Clute and Nicholls, 1999).

<sup>659</sup> See Roberts (2006, 129-35) on Jules Verne's work.

<sup>660</sup> See Heidegger (1977) on technology, and on Heidegger, Zimmerman (1981).

device, artefact or premise that focuses the difference between the world the reader inhabits and the fictional world of the science fiction text. This *novum* might be something material, such as a spaceship, a time machine or a communications device; or it might be something conceptual, such as a new conception of gender or consciousness'.<sup>661</sup> The science fiction genre has also been defined as: 'that species of storytelling native to a culture undergoing epistemic changes implicated in the rise and supersession of technical-industrial modes of production, distribution, consumption and disposal.' It is clear from these definitions that the innovation and progress naturally occurring in any culture might be the catalyst for the genre.<sup>662</sup>

There are also several schools of thought as to the origins of the genre itself. Scholars have questioned why such fierce debates centre around this genre specifically. The critical discussion around science fiction extends from theories regarding its inception as a recognisable genre, to the origins of the name 'science fiction' itself. Writers such as Edgar Allen Poe self-classified their work, with Poe terming it 'ratiocination' and H. G. Wells calling his works 'scientific romance'. Jules Verne's works were retrospectively termed '*voyages extraordinaires*',<sup>663</sup> and these factors highlight that it is not necessary for authors to self-classify their work into a particular generic category (or, since the science fiction genre was not fully recognised then, a field) for them to be subsequently placed into that category.<sup>664</sup> In

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<sup>661</sup> Suvin (1979), as summarised by Parrinder (1995, 4).

<sup>662</sup> Rogers and Stevens (2012, 129-30) see science fiction as '*the mainstream mode, of thinking about the modern, technoscientific world [and a] site of significant classical receptions*'.

<sup>663</sup> Stockwell (2000, 7) sees generic identification as being firmly in the hands of the reader. Hugo Gernsback, editor of *Amazing Stories* (1926), asked readers choose the name for the genre of the stories they were reading, which were by authors such as Verne, Wells, and Poe; they came up with 'scientifiction' (see Parrinder (1995, 128) and Slusser (2007, 27-8)). Wells himself rules out any identification between his own work and that of Verne in the preface to his *Scientific Romances* (vii in the 1987 edition), aligning his work with that of Apuleius and Lucian (ibid.). Parrinder and Philmus (1980, 222-6) discuss the self-deprecating nature of this preface. See Roberts (2006, 21-2) on Apuleius as SF.

<sup>664</sup> Roberts (2006, 70) points out that Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) is about travelling to the most remote parts of the world, an endeavour which at the time presented a similar challenge to that of a

terms of dating the origins of the genre itself, the early nineteenth century novel *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (Mary Shelley, 1818) is often cited as the incipient and fundamental work of the genre.<sup>665</sup> The convergence in the novel of literary styles, genres, and real-life discoveries is a particular critical focus, with the 19<sup>th</sup> century regarded as the time when literature and technological progress begin to go hand in hand.<sup>666</sup> Some critics suggest that ancient world writers were the major influence for science fiction,<sup>667</sup> though others warn against attempting to find a universal label of science fiction for all early Greek literature, citing Lucian as the only potential example, since it falls into the category of ‘journeys into the atmosphere, or journeys to the Moon and solar system’.<sup>668</sup> Discussions over the relationship between science and literature, and how these point to the genre’s origins, are similarly strained. There are two prominent hypotheses of the origins of science fiction: a ‘single origin theory’, which explores the ‘*impact* of scientific or technological advancement on human beings’, and a second ‘gradualist’ theory, which ‘sees multiple origins or points of contact between science and fiction’.<sup>669</sup> In terms of the genre’s development over time, a similar bifurcated structure appears, with suggestions of two strands of the genre forming, one from Wells, and the other from Verne.<sup>670</sup> An important point is that the common belief that topics and subjects

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modern Moon landing. Verne, Wells, and for some, Lucian have not lost their status as SF writers now that we have achieved that feat; once the fiction in a science fiction story becomes fact, its place in the ‘generic grid’ does not change.

<sup>665</sup> Parrinder (1995, 2). Slusser (2007, 27) wonders whether Mary Shelley had a name for what she was writing. Lederer and Ratzan (2007, 455) discuss the blend of several literary genres employed by Shelley. Rogers and Stevens (2012, 127) discuss the implicit link between the novel’s subtitle and the classical world. On the importance of the Prometheus myth in terms of time, see Feeney (2007, 111-2); on Prometheus and technology in Valerius’ work, Davis (2010, 3-4).

<sup>666</sup> Though, see note 21.

<sup>667</sup> Roberts (2006, vii) sees modern SF as the ‘re-emergence of an ancient mode’.

<sup>668</sup> Roberts (2006, 22; see also vii-viii and Fredericks (1976) and Swanson (1976)). Rogers and Stevens (2012, 133-4) discuss the origins of SF and its relationship to Classics, suggesting that ‘SF and the discipline of Classics seem to have developed simultaneously’.

<sup>669</sup> Slusser (2007, 28-42).

<sup>670</sup> Evans (2009).

of science fiction are firmly set in the future may not always be the case; they need only be ‘closely cognate [with the future]. All observers agree that the presence of an innovation – ‘the strange property or the strange world’ as Wells put it – distinguishes the science fiction story’.<sup>671</sup>

At first glance, it may seem incongruous to try to discuss the very modern genre of science fiction alongside very ancient texts.<sup>672</sup> Whilst it would be unwise to try to reclassify the Valerian *Argonautica* itself as a text belonging to the genre of science fiction, it is not impossible to see how the poem’s interest in new technology and travel might lend itself to the genre.<sup>673</sup> The *Argo*, as a maritime innovation, is fundamentally a *novum*;<sup>674</sup> in the period before ships were in existence, they were a fiction of science.<sup>675</sup> It therefore follows that writers of science fiction receiving the Argonautic myth might read it as a suitable one to adapt to their own narratives concerning their anxieties over technological advance. For the Roman audience, the *Argo* as a *novum* focuses their minds on the fact that the world they inhabited as audience was very different to the one portrayed in the poem.<sup>676</sup> However it is not enough to simply draw comparisons between the contested definitions of science fiction and the features about which Valerius writes. The ways in which modern

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<sup>671</sup> Parrinder (1995, 10). Stockwell (2000, 17) adds that not all SF is futuristic in language and setting. One thinks of the opening ‘proem’ of *Star Wars* (1977, dir. George Lucas), in which the technology is depicted as being many times more advanced than our own, leading the audience to expect a story set in the future; and yet, the story takes place: ‘A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away’. See Sawyer (2007) for a discussion of film’s the representation of the droids as having roots in the slavery system of the United States.

<sup>672</sup> See Brown (2008) on the ‘unexpected affinities’ between SF and Classics, and Rogers and Stevens (2012, 133) on the dangers of excluding the possibility of discovering commonalities between SF and Classics by applying strict literary constraints.

<sup>673</sup> See Liveley (2006) on the science fiction qualities of Hephaestus’ automata (*Il.* 18.373-9; 417-21) and Alcinous’ metal guard dogs (*Od.* 7.94-4).

<sup>674</sup> Rogers and Stevens (2012, 132-9) explore Suvin’s *novum* and ideas of ‘cognitive estrangement’, suggesting that ‘the rubric of SF is applicable to certain works whether or not they share the same historical contexts as modern SF or its engagement with a specifically technoscientific ideology’. Valerius’ *Argonautica* in particular seems to have a ‘specific technoscientific ideology’, in part, and at the very least in the first four books.

<sup>675</sup> To cite Rogers and Stevens (2012, 135) once more, they propose an umbrella term for applying the rubric of SF to ancient works, calling it ‘knowledge fiction’.

<sup>676</sup> Suvin (1979, xv) acknowledges the Latin origin and influence of his choice of word.

science fiction writers have used Argonautic imagery to fulfil their desires for social comment, thought provocation, and most importantly (and not forgetting) entertainment, are fascinating, and consideration of these sheds light upon the impact of how we receive the ancient work itself.

Turning now to literary works of science fiction, the major focus of the present study is aspects of the literary output of H. G. Wells. A number of points of interest converge in Wells' work, with regard to not only his use of Argonautic imagery, but also his background, interests, and the era in which he wrote. Wells' use of Argonautic themes initially began in an early short story, which he developed into one of the most famous works in the canon. Argonautic themes are also prominent in another of his works, a short story with an overtly moralist tone. Boundary-breaking and pioneering technology here reveals the hubris of man, and speaks to the concerns of Wells' age. Moving on, the second focus will be on a work by the modern writer Robert J. Sawyer. Here, harnessing the ideas about, excitement surrounding, and progress of humans in space in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Sawyer uses Argonautic imagery to explore human endurance, survival, and invention. These writers recognise the symbolic value behind the pioneering adventures of the Argonauts, and have adapted features of this ancient story to explore issues pertinent to their own time. On establishing the nature of these receptions, we will be able to assess how they might be reflected back onto Valerius' *Argonautica*, to reveal new interpretations of that text.

## 6.2 Wells and his Argonauts – ‘The Chronic Argonauts’ (1888)

H. G. Wells (21 September 1866 – 13 August 1946) is known as the ‘the greatest novelist to have worked in the science fiction idiom’<sup>677</sup> and the ‘author most responsible for defining the direction of the science fiction movement in the twentieth century’.<sup>678</sup> He was ‘one of the first professional writers of fiction to have had a formal scientific education and the first for whom the role of science in society was a primary question’.<sup>679</sup> Indeed Wells used his early literature as a ‘mouthpiece for science’ with which to participate in topical scientific debates.<sup>680</sup> There are those who believe that that the modern desire to elevate Wells’ status to ‘founding father of science fiction’ has diluted and detracted from his rigorous investigations, scientific analysis, demonstrations of his knowledge, and desire to be taken seriously as someone fundamentally concerned with, to the point of out and out criticism of, the folly of scientific advance.<sup>681</sup>

Wells’ desire to provide social comment through his work should not be underestimated. As a boy, the Elementary Education Act of 1871 had not long been in force, and people were free to set up schools as they pleased. As a child, Wells was taught little more than British history and geography, including that of the British Empire.<sup>682</sup> After a scattered and fragmented education, and a brief and very unhappy period as an apprentice draper, he eventually found himself the recipient of a scholarship to study at the Royal College of Science in London, becoming very

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<sup>677</sup> Roberts (2006, 143). For Crossley (2007, 354) Wells’ early work ‘set the gold standard for science fiction’.

<sup>678</sup> Parrinder and Philmus (1980, 226).

<sup>679</sup> Haynes (1980, 1).

<sup>680</sup> McLean (2009, 3). See Luckhurst and McDonagh’s edited volume (2002) on science and culture in the nineteenth century.

<sup>681</sup> McLean (2009, 2).

<sup>682</sup> Wells (1934, 100).

interested in science, and particularly in the works of Charles Darwin.<sup>683</sup> It was here that he was able to read ‘abundantly’ at the Dyce and Forster library,<sup>684</sup> an establishment which boasted several first editions of classic works of literature. The *Handbook of the Dyce and Forster Collections at South Kensington Museum* (page 16) gives a summary of the classical authors available, such as ‘Aeschylus, Aristotle, Anacreon, Cicero, Euripides, Homer, Horace, Juvenal, Livy, Lucan, Martial, Ovid, Pindar, Sophocles, Theocritus, Virgil’, and goes on to say that ‘Mr. Dyce was not, like many collectors, contented to possess only the “great and well-known” authors. Scarcely two pages of the catalogue can be examined without coming across the name of some Latin or Greek writer, of whom very few people know much more than the name. Thus, there are two editions of Achilles Tatius, three or four of Lycophron, eight of Manilius, five of Nicander, and three of Valerius Flaccus.’ It is clear, then, that Wells had access to some books of Valerius Flaccus’ poem at South Kensington, but the issue of whether those of his works containing Argonautic references were direct responses to this text, is addressed below.

Wells also had the benefit of access to an extensive library at Up Park, where his mother was a housekeeper. He writes in his autobiography:

‘Yet, though I did not realise it, I was getting through something of very great importance in my education during these months of outward inaction [Wells spent much of 1887-8 at Up Park following a diagnosis of tuberculosis] [...] I read everything accessible. I ground out some sonnets. I struggled

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<sup>683</sup> Bergonzi (1961, 11) notes the presence of Darwin in Wells’ works. See Hughes (1976) on Bergonzi’s criticism itself.

<sup>684</sup> *The Correspondence of H.G. Wells*, letter 238 to Grant Richards, (249-50).



with Spenser; I read Shelley, Keats, Heine, Whitman, Lamb, Holmes, Stevenson, Hawthorne, and a number of popular novels.’<sup>685</sup>

Wells’ own work, which sprang from these fruitful periods of reading, is varied in style: his efforts pre-1901 are seen as stories in a somewhat mythological mode, while his later work becomes more didactic.<sup>686</sup> His first forays into the world of literary fiction take place toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a fact which has led to Wells being classified as a ‘*fin de siècle* writer’.<sup>687</sup> He is perhaps most famous for his novella *The Time Machine*, a scientific romance first published in 1895.<sup>688</sup> However, this work was in fact a reworking of one of the earliest pieces he had attempted, a short story published in instalments in *The Science Schools Journal* of 1888, entitled ‘The Chronic Argonauts’. Both stories are therefore of interest in this study, not least since the title of his earlier version contains a specific Argonautic reference.

Turning first to the earlier text, we find that ‘The Chronic Argonauts’ is a dark and compelling tale, described as the ‘most ambitious and important piece of writing surviving from his earliest years’.<sup>689</sup> It is told in three parts but remains unfinished, as Wells explains:

‘Moreover, I began a romance, very much under the influence of Hawthorne, which was printed in the *Science Schools Journal*, the *Chronic Argonauts*. I broke this off

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<sup>685</sup> Wells (1934, 304-5).

<sup>686</sup> Bergonzi (1961, 18). See Haynes (1980, 69) on Wells, the distinction between science and technology, and a moral responsibility of scientists for such technology.

<sup>687</sup> See Bergonzi (1961, 3). For an opposing view, see Parrinder (1970); for more on the *fin de siècle* generally, see Ledger and Luckhurst (2000).

<sup>688</sup> Luckhurst (2005, 30-49) examines the evolution of British scientific romance.

<sup>689</sup> Bergonzi (1961, 25).

after three instalments because I could not go on with it. That I realised I could not go on with it marks a stage in my education in the art of fiction. It was the original draft of what later became the *Time Machine*, which first won me recognition as an imaginative writer.’<sup>690</sup>

The repeated reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne is of particular note here. Wells makes clear his passion for the writer in his autobiography: indeed, a few lines earlier he links the Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter* (1850) to ‘The Chronic Argonauts’.<sup>691</sup> Intriguingly, Hawthorne had published a children’s book which included an account of the Argonautic saga in 1852 (*Tanglewood Tales, for Girls and Boys; Being a Second Wonder-Book*). Wells must surely have been aware of this work, indeed ‘the mere fact of Wells acknowledging the influence of Hawthorne on his earliest fiction is significant, since it puts him into a direct relationship with a major nineteenth-century writer of symbolic fiction’.<sup>692</sup> Here, in Hawthorne’s influence, may be another clue to Wells’ fondness for using the Argonauts as a suitable basis for exploring transgression. We shall return to this below.

The first part of Wells’ short story concerns the arrival of an inscrutable scientist, Dr. Moses Nebogipfel, in the sleepy Welsh village of Llyddwdd. The residents of the village are fascinated by his arrival, but this soon turns to suspicion and finally hysteria as their imaginations overtake rationality. After a lengthy

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<sup>690</sup> Wells (1934, 309).

<sup>691</sup> Bergonzi (1961, 30-1) refutes this as ‘scarcely pronounced’, believing that there are more detectable links with Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). See Gale (1991) for more on Hawthorne.

<sup>692</sup> Bergonzi (1961, 31). Interestingly, Nathaniel’s son Julian Hawthorne (1804-1864) had a novel entitled *The Golden Fleece* published posthumously in 1896. This story concerned the gold rush in the California. On a similar theme, see *Tales of the Argonauts* (1875) by Bret Harte (1836-1902). Gummere (1957) discusses earlier re-workings of the Argonautic saga pertaining to the explorations of Virginia in 17<sup>th</sup> century.

introduction, which builds the suspense and tension to fever pitch, the residents decide to storm the cottage in which he resides. As they arrive, they witness Nebogipfel and a local Reverend, Elijah Ulysses Cook, disappearing into thin air. The second part of the story then begins, and this relates what happens when Reverend Cook reappears some time later in front of the ‘author’. A strange contraption materialises bearing two men, and then it disappears once again, leaving Reverend Cook behind. The Reverend then suffers a mystery illness, and the ‘author’ takes him in, installing a nurse to look after him. Reverend Cook asks to make a deposition, saying:

“‘It concerns the murder of an old man named Williams, which occurred in 1862, this disappearance of Dr. Moses Nebogipfel, the abduction of a ward in the year 4003 ----. [...]’ The author stared. ‘The year of our Lord 4003,’ he corrected. ‘She would come. Also several assaults on public officials in the years 17,901 and 2.’”<sup>693</sup> (145)

Reverend Cook’s deposition constitutes the remainder of the story, since the ‘author’ now recounts what the Reverend has told him.

Cook dies in the process of telling his tale, but we learn that earlier in the chronology of the story, he had gone to see Nebogipfel to warn him that the tide of feeling in the village was turning against him. As he arrives, he is frightened by Nebogipfel’s appearance:

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<sup>693</sup> The page numbers refer to the location in *The Definitive Time Machine*, with introduction by Geduld.

‘he was stricken rigid with horror by the swift, noiseless apparition of Nebogipfel, ghastly pale, and with red stained hands, crouching upon a strange-looking metallic platform, and with his deep grey eyes looking intently into the visitor’s face’.(146)

The Reverend faints at the sight, but when he regains consciousness, he learns a great deal more about this strange visitor to the village. Nebogipfel explains to the curious Reverend, a somewhat more rational character than his fellow village-dwellers, that the machine he is manufacturing allows him to travel through time:

“In short, Mr. Cook, I discovered that I was one of those superior Cagots called a genius -- a man born out of my time -- a man thinking the thoughts of a wiser age, doing things and believing things that men now *cannot* understand, and that in the years ordained to me there was nothing but silence and suffering for my soul -- unbroken solitude, man’s bitterest pain. I knew I was an Anachronic Man; my age was still to come. One filmy hope alone held me to life, a hope to which I clung until it had become a certain thing. Thirty years of unremitting toil and deepest thought among the hidden things of matter and form and life, and then *that*, the Chronic *Argo, the ship that sails through time*, and now I go to join my generation, to journey through the ages till my time has come.” [original italics].(148-9)

After some further discussion, the clergyman boards the craft and escapes with the doctor just as the baying mob burst in, armed with firebrands and accusations.

While the plot of this story itself has no initial relation to Jason and his quest for the Golden Fleece, Wells' choice of title for the vessel and those who travel upon it is obviously striking. This is one of the first attempts by any writer to tackle the complex issue of theories of time travel, and achieving that feat using a piece of apparatus.<sup>694</sup> Wells himself has this to say about his work:

‘And think of “Chronic” and “Argonauts” in the title! The ineptitude of this rococo title for a hard mathematical invention!’<sup>695</sup>

Wells obviously sees the title of the work as florid and overly elaborate, and his self-criticism is directed at his naivety in writing, due to the fact that he had not ‘yet learned his craft’.<sup>696</sup> This is clearly reflected in Wells' failure to finish the short story. Despite his derogatory remarks, the name he has chosen for the vessel and for those who travel on it is evocative. Wells proclaims it ‘odd’ that he gave his first story such a classical name ‘seeing that I had little Latin or Greek’,<sup>697</sup> though in fact

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<sup>694</sup> Other earlier journeys of time travel took place through the protagonist falling into a deep sleep, rather than by using a machine; see for example William Morris' utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (1890). As Parrinder (1995, 42-3) argues: '[there are] strong connections between *News from Nowhere* and *The Time Machine* as detailed at the beginning of [Wells' work] *A Modern Utopia* [1905]'. Note that Carey (1999) includes Hesiod, Homer, Ovid, Plato, Tacitus, Plutarch, Irenaeus, Lucian, and Tertullian in his collection of 'utopias'. William Morris also published his own version of the Argonautic saga; a lengthy poem entitled *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867). On Morris, see Mackail (1899). For the connections between Valerius' *Argonautica* and Morris' *Jason* poem, see Zissos (2006, 181).

<sup>695</sup> Wells (1934, 309).

<sup>696</sup> Wells (1934, 309).

<sup>697</sup> Wells (1934, 339).

he did study Latin in his earlier years, and with some success.<sup>698</sup> What is clear is that these characters are called Argonauts because they are undertaking a journey using a vehicle which is a piece of technological advance far beyond what humans can achieve, still now. Nebogipfel has called his vessel *Chronic Argo* and on this vessel he will be able to break the boundaries of time. Certainly this would be the first ship capable of time travel in history, just as the ancient *Argo* was the first sea-going vessel.

There are further links to maritime imagery to explore. The *Argo*'s primacy is here linked to making the first journey through *time*, rather than across the sea; nevertheless, the names of his characters are also loaded with maritime symbolism. The notion of an unknowable journey is underlined by the name Elijah Ulysses Cook. The name Elijah is reminiscent of the prophet, an apt connection since the Reverend has seen the future. Ulysses is of course the Roman name for that great sea-traveller Odysseus, and the inclusion of this name may have reminded Wells' audience of Tennyson's *Ulysses*, which had been published in 1842.<sup>699</sup> Tennyson's Ulysses is a man yearning to explore again, following his years on the sea on his journey back from Troy. The Reverend dies soon after he is returned to his own time, and as such it is difficult to see him as someone who yearns to travel again. Those qualities may be better ascribed to Nebogipfel, who has a yearning to find his 'own people', since he believes he is 'born out of his time'.<sup>700</sup> The name Ulysses may also remind the audience of Dante's Ulisse in his *Inferno* (c. 1320), where Ulysses is seen as a transgressor. Finally, the name Cook may remind us of the real-life Great British explorer, Captain James Cook.

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<sup>698</sup> Wells (1934, 139-40); see also 152: 'for some time Latin was for me'.

<sup>699</sup> On receptions of the Odysseus myth, see Boitani (1994), and Hall (2008).

<sup>700</sup> Bergonzi (1961, 35-6) discusses the significance of Nebogipfel's Christian name, Moses, and the potential links to Mount Nebo.

In a story about breaking boundaries, we may note there does not seem to be a definite ending to this short story; indeed it concludes in a rather abrupt fashion:

“A pause. A hoarse shout changing suddenly into a sharp shrill shriek. A thunderous roar like the bursting forth of a great fountain of water. The voyage of the Chronic Argonauts had begun.” (151-2)

The timeline of the story is garbled, with the ‘conclusion’ being told in part two (the part dealing with Cook’s deposition). However the greater part of the adventure is merely hinted at, with the actual content of the time travel experience not elucidated here. Rather, Wells writes a full and comprehensive account of time travel in his scientific romance, *The Time Machine*.<sup>701</sup>

On the face of it, this seems reasonable enough – without knowing any further specifics, *Argo*’s fame alone might lead one to believe without question that it is universally accepted to have been the first ship. As such, the lending of its name to another boundary-breaker, though this time the boundary of time, seems almost obvious. But it is important to remember that the *Argo*’s primacy was an idea taken on board by the Romans rather than by earlier writers. Wells’ access to a number of works of classical literature at the South Kensington Museum<sup>702</sup> means that potentially he was able to read about the Argonauts in their Roman context, with the Roman preoccupation with the ship’s primacy at its core. Though Catullus’ work is not mentioned in the *Handbook* as being held in the Dyce and Forster collection, it is conceivable that they were; Ovid also made several forays into Argonautic territory,

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<sup>701</sup> See below.

<sup>702</sup> See above.

and his name does appear on the list. Most importantly for our purposes, however, is the appearance of the name Valerius Flaccus. The Dyce collection boasts three books of the *Argonautica*, thus it is conceivable that Wells, with his fondness for Latin, read them in the original and was exposed to the idea of the *Argo* as primal through Valerius Flaccus himself.<sup>703</sup>

In this early story, Wells has begun to flirt with the idea of time travel, a feat which remains out of reach. The Argonauts are here being evoked as boundary-breakers, but the nature of the ancient journey has been modified to instead consist of travel through time. Nebogipfel's representation as somewhat other-worldly<sup>704</sup> provides a neat contrast with his established and rather ordinary human companion, Reverend Cook, who does not fare well in his brush with the 'Anachronic man'.<sup>705</sup> His return to his own time, only to die while telling his story, clearly demonstrates that this is dangerous technology which only those who understand it should use, and that those who do choose to expose themselves to the possibilities which it offers are putting themselves at great risk. The significance of the ancient Argonauts as boundary-breakers is brought to the fore here, and altered to consider a feat of science as yet unreachable. Wells has recognised that the notion of crossing of previously insurmountable boundaries, and the exploration of unknown worlds, can be interrogated using Argonautic imagery. Prior to reworking this short story into the

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<sup>703</sup> Though see Martindale (2007, 309), who following his examination of Velázquez's painting known as *The Spinners* and its links to Ovid, argues 'we do not know whether *The Spinners* involved a direct response to Ovid's text, or one largely based or wholly mediated by the Ovidian tradition in the visual arts [...] Claiming that the painting is an important reception of Ovid does not require us to resolve that issue. My point is rather that by putting *The Spinners* and the *Metamorphoses* into conjunction [demonstrates that...] poem and painting can then mutually illuminate each other, suggesting interpretive possibilities without closing discussion down.' Therefore, while this study cannot prove either way whether Wells did in fact read Valerius may not be an issue, there is a demonstrable possibility, that he did. See Zissos (2006a) for a helpful study on the 'reception' of Valerius.

<sup>704</sup> See note 75, below.

<sup>705</sup> Bergonzi (1961, 35) discusses the solitariness of Nebogipfel, and that he 'embodies an image of the future'. He suggests that this points to the *fin de siècle* fears of the coming century.



famous romance *The Time Machine*, Wells once again uses Argonautic imagery in an obvious way, in his 1895 short story, ‘The Argonauts of the Air’.

### 6.3 ‘The Argonauts of the Air’ (1895)

Despite his misgivings about the title of his earliest fiction,<sup>706</sup> Wells does not completely abandon direct references to the Argonauts. Turning now to another of his short stories, *The Argonauts of the Air*,<sup>707</sup> published in 1895 (the same year as *The Time Machine*), the ancient reference is once again immediate. This story outlines the endeavours of a Mr Monson, who along with his team of engineers and workmen, have taken on an earlier failed attempt at creating a machine for human flight, and are now attempting to make a success of their own incarnation. The narrator is ‘both pessimistic yet enthralled with the technological future’,<sup>708</sup> and the story is again a dark one. Once again, technology is the preoccupation in this tale, and it opens with a description of a huge structure designed to propel a vessel into the air. This structure is described as being visible from the windows of passing trains, that great Victorian invention. The technology of the ‘future’ is therefore immediately juxtaposed with technology of the time, creating a tension between them. However the title of the piece indicates that the focus of the story will be on those who are attempting human flight; the trains might therefore be cast in something of a positive light in comparison to the flying contraption.

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<sup>706</sup> See above.

<sup>707</sup> ‘Flight is a persistent concern of 18<sup>th</sup> Century science fiction’ (Roberts 2006, 75).

<sup>708</sup> Shaw (2008, 22).

The narrator indicates that the flying machine is being put together at tremendous expense, but that the precise amount spent is hearsay. Monson is described as being infected with a ‘mania for invention’, and the press, it seems, have been calling the contraption ‘Monson’s Folly’ for some time. Monson quickly tires of the constant criticism and is impatient to achieve flight. He is frustrated at the public’s lack of understanding of what he is trying to achieve. The public are wary of the risky nature of his work, and the transgressive nature of human flight itself; his is a quest doomed to fail, no matter how much money is spent on it. The constant attacks on his reputation lead Monson to rush the first flight of his contraption, with devastating consequences.

The existing technology of trains is once again contrasted when Monson takes his machine out on its maiden flight. The engine-driver and stoker of a passing train cease to pay attention to their own work to watch the spectacle, and this ends in them running straight through the station in which they are supposed to stop. It seems that a desire to view this transgressive spectacle results in calamity in established technology (which will itself, perhaps, have been seen at one time as being transgressive).<sup>709</sup> There are links to other technological progress to be seen in the story too: in the description of his flying machine, Wells uses terminology that reminds the reader of the world-conquering technological advancement involved in the birth of ships and sea-faring. The Flying Machine has a deck which is compared to that of a liner, and the narrator compares the lives lost and money spent trying to conquer the air as exceeding that which is spent on trying to conquer the sea. In the end, Monson and Woodhouse fall from the Flying Machine before it hurtles to the

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<sup>709</sup> See Shaw (2008, 22) on the links between trains and flying in this story.

ground and crashes; the experiment is a grisly disaster and testament to man's arrogance.

Wells moves on from the somewhat mythical and other-worldly nature of 'The Chronic Argonauts' in this story, and seems to be offering social comment on a much more tangible topic through this short story.<sup>710</sup> He certainly has a negative view on the outcome of these endeavours. Again, the Argonauts are identified with a technological 'first'; again the outcome is not at all positive. Wells appears to be engaging with very clear ideas on the folly of technological endeavour which go against the natural order. Here flying, a concern very real at the time of writing, is explored using Argonautic themes, rather than an achievement which still remains out of human reach. 'Heavier than air' flight was repeatedly tested and attempted throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, with 'lighter than air' flight (e.g. using balloons and airships) achieved earlier. The first sustained, controlled, powered heavier-than-air manned flight was achieved on December 17, 1903, less than a decade after the publication of this work; such an accomplishment was therefore to occur in the not-to-distant future. In using the Argonautic imagery in his 1895 story, Wells evokes the pioneering spirit of that endeavour, but also perhaps inspires both a closer look at the transgressive elements of the Argonautic quest, and a re-evaluation of its morals, to discover whether they were as skewed as Wells sees Monson's own to be.

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<sup>710</sup> Shaw (2008, 22): 'If one accepts Wells' moral, it is that technological accomplishment will necessarily require human sacrifice: a man giving up his body and mind to the man-made tin god'.

## 6.4 The plot of *The Time Machine* (1895)

It is time to return to the novella which constituted a re-write of 'The Chronic Argonauts'.<sup>711</sup> *The Time Machine* is perhaps Wells' most famous work, and is referred to as 'poetic social allegory'.<sup>712</sup> Wells does not resurrect the character of Nebogipfel,<sup>713</sup> but has instead rewritten and redrafted the basic plot points extensively.<sup>714</sup> The protagonist is now a more plausible inventor of the Victorian age,<sup>715</sup> albeit an unnamed one; he is a well-established and wealthy socialite rather than being a mysterious conjurer. Whereas 'The Chronic Argonauts' might perhaps be seen as a more mythological version of the tale, which develops out of Wells' familiarity with scientific language,<sup>716</sup> this seems to be a more 'rational' version of the time travel story. The reception of the Argonautic myth is also more complex in this tale.

Wells' unnamed main character is allowed to give the full account of his story, the narration of which takes up almost the entire story, uninterrupted in a first-person narrative until he has completely finished his tale. He explains that he initially

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<sup>711</sup> Wells writes in his letters: 'The *Chronic Argonauts* is no joke. There is a sequel – it is the latest Delphic voice though the tripod is not yet broken' (Smith 1998, 107-8; Letter 90, to Elizabeth Healey, June 19 [1888]). Is there perhaps a hint at Valerius Flaccus in this reference to the tripod? He later comments: 'Our ancient *Chronic Argonauts* of the *Science Schools Journal* has at last become a complete story' (Smith 1998, 226; Letter 211, to Elizabeth Healey, December 22 [1894]). Between 1889 and 1892, Wells wrote two more versions of the *Chronic Argonauts*, neither of which survive (Bergonzi 1961, 38). See Philmus (1998) on rewrites of the short story.

<sup>712</sup> Bergonzi (1961, 48). See also Hollinger (1987) and Crossley (2007, 355).

<sup>713</sup> 'Dr Nebogipfel [...] has very little to do with the atmosphere of progressive thinking and intellectual inquiry that had characterised the Royal College of Science in eighties [...] and a great deal to do with a literary tradition exemplified by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll*. Stevenson's story had appeared in 1886, two years before Wells' romance. Nebogipfel is the scientist as magician or alchemist, rather than the sober investigator of the physical world'. (Bergonzi 1961, 34). See Haynes (1980, 198) on the significance of the unnamed traveller.

<sup>714</sup> 'Yet though *The Chronic Argonauts* is very much a traditional romance, it does contain the seeds of the 'scientific' notion on which *The Time Machine* was to depend [...] the only passages where the two works all resemble each other are in the accounts of the principles of time travelling.' (Bergonzi 1961, 31). The links are in fact stronger than this, as we shall see.

<sup>715</sup> On the hero, see Begiebing (1984). Willis (1999) believes Wells' inspiration for the character was Thomas Edison.

<sup>716</sup> Bergonzi (1961, 17) discusses Wells' education, which allowed him to lend 'plausibility' to these scenes. Wells makes reference to this himself in the preface to his *Scientific Romances* (1935).

travelled to the year 802,701 in his contraption, before moving on again to a point further ahead in time, and then returning to his own era. Upon arriving at his first stop, initially the traveller believes that he has arrived in a 'promised land', since before him he sees a utopian landscape of lush greenery, abundant food, and clean, flowing water. He is soon welcomed by a group of inhabitants, diminutive in stature and users of a primitive language, the Eloi.<sup>717</sup> The Eloi's lack of discernible intellect and simple nature reveals a critical flaw in how they live: while this is a pastoral, Golden Age at first sight,<sup>718</sup> the reality of the situation at nightfall is violently different. The Morlocks, creatures more animalistic than the Eloi and resembling primates,<sup>719</sup> ascend to the surface each night to feed upon them.<sup>720</sup> The duration of the traveller's stay in this future world ends up being longer than he had anticipated, since his ability to leave at will is impaired by the loss of his machine. After a frantic search and an expedition to find materials to assist him, he realises that the intelligent Morlocks are probably the culprits of the theft, and shortly after rediscovering the machine, he moves on. His penultimate destination is further ahead again into the future. Here, there are no humanoids to be found; instead giant, mutated, crab-like creatures crawl around, and the sun appears to have collapsed. After experiencing all this, he travels home, and tells his story.

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<sup>717</sup> McLean (2009, 35) discusses anthropological views on the degeneration of language, which here goes hand in hand with technological progress.

<sup>718</sup> McLean (2009, 17) suggests that the Eloi perhaps owe something to William Morris' 'Nowhereians', from his utopian novel *News from Nowhere*. Morris' *Life and Death of Jason* may provide another point of contact between Valerius and Wells (see Zissos 2006b on the links between the texts).

<sup>719</sup> See Liveley (2006) on the Darwinian theory blurring the boundary between man and animal, and the links to hybrid theory, the cyborg, and the monster. Wells was an enthusiastic follower of Darwin (see note 40). On monsters in the *Argonautica*, see chapters 3-5.

<sup>720</sup> Crossley (2007, 356) discusses the significance of the sphinx which stands near the traveller's arrival point. Crossley suggests that the answer to the sphinx's ancient riddle, 'man', is also the solution to the mysterious origins of the Eloi and Morlocks. 'These Eloi were fattened cattle, which the antlike Morlocks preserved and preyed upon – and probably saw to the breeding of' (71 – the pages numbers refer to the location in *The Definitive Time Machine*, with introduction by Geduld). McLean (2009, 19; n. 33) sees the classical references in *The Time Machine* as 'contrived to emphasise the futility of the [British] imperial project'.

Overt Argonautic references seem absent from this work at first sight, but on further investigation, links are to be seen. Upon arriving in the year 802,701, the traveller starts out by believing that the world has actually returned to the Golden Age, a benign future where a race of innocents dwell in harmony and have no need for speech or agriculture, and no use for technology of any kind. He notes that the Eloi do not work,<sup>721</sup> and that their diet consists of only fruit (47), and comments that ‘the whole earth had become a garden’ (50). He theorises that humans have worked to improve their living conditions over the intervening millennia, ‘And the harvest was what I saw!’ (50). The traveller’s initial impression of his destination is therefore a positive one; indeed he sees the place as a utopia. In this spirit of initial positivity, he theorises that humans have carefully readjusted the natural world so that it has begun to operate at an optimum level for our consumption and use.<sup>722</sup> Preventative medicines have wiped out disease, and humans are now able to exist without fear of any form of contagion (50-1). The language in this part of the novel reflects this optimism, with the sky being described as ‘flaming gold, touched with bars of purple and crimson’ (49). The people he meets are ‘engaged in no toil’ (51), and these factors combine to convince the traveller that man has entered a Golden Age; indeed the traveller uses this description on more than one occasion. He only begins to reassess this notion when the last link to his own world, his machine, goes missing. At this stage he remarks: ‘how wide [is] the interval between myself and the Golden Age!’ (57). His feelings toward his situation are now beginning to change, and the loss of an element of control of the situation begins to alter his view of this future world.

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<sup>721</sup> Haynes (1980, 71) describes this as ‘Arcadian leisure’.

<sup>722</sup> See McLean (2009, 22-6).

This is a rewrite of Wells' earlier story 'The Chronic Argonauts', and that term is also a suitable one to classify the main character of this later work. This traveller is characterised as the only man in existence to have travelled through time in this way, thus highlighting his transgressive status. His journey has taken him not only out of his own time, but also out of the urban setting of his home and into a pastoral setting. In transgressing the boundaries of what is possible both scientifically and technologically, arguably the character has also transgressed the genre in which he is presented. If the world of the future is a Golden Age and has become a garden, then the traveller appears to have crossed out of a scientific romance and into pastoral.<sup>723</sup> Furthermore, it is possible to link agriculture – or lack thereof – with Argonautic themes, since the building of the *Argo* heralds the end of the Golden Age and the beginning of the age of Iron.<sup>724</sup> Here we seem to have the conflation of a technological transgression (a time machine, once named *Argo*) and the idea of a return, for the traveller, to the Golden Age, an era which the inauguration of the ancient *Argo* ended. The possibility of a Golden Age in the future also prompts questions about the cyclical nature of time itself,<sup>725</sup> and speaks to similar theories raised by Augustan poets.<sup>726</sup> For example, Virgil conflates the ideas of a return to the Golden Age, pastoral themes, and Argonautic imagery in his bucolic *Eclogues*.<sup>727</sup> In *The Time Machine*, the loaded phrase 'Golden Age' evokes this era in antiquity.<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>723</sup> On pastoral in science fiction, see Sawyer (2006). See chapter 2.2 on genre transgression in the *Argonautica* (and specifically concerning Jason's wishes for flying machines (and thus out-of-reach technology) in 1.67-70.

<sup>724</sup> Feeney (2007, ch. 4). Hes. *O.* 90-2.

<sup>725</sup> Feeney (2007).

<sup>726</sup> For example, see Adler (2003) on the politics of the Roman 'Golden Age' of literature, and Evans (2008) for a 'utopian' look at Roman literature of the age.

<sup>727</sup> See especially Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*, where before the coming of a new Golden Age, a second Tiphys and second *Argo* arise, following man being tempted to abide by 'ancient sin': *Pauca tamen suberunt priscae uestigia fraudis, / quae temptare Thetin ratibus, quae cingere muris / oppida, quae iubeant telluri infundere sulcos. / alter erit tum Tiphys et altera quae uehat Argo / delectos heroas;* (*Ecl.* 4.31-5). Virgil's work was available to Wells in the Dyce and Forster collection at South Kensington; as a keen Latinist, it is surely to be accepted that he had access to Virgil's work. On the

The primitiveness of the world into which the traveller has entered also resonates with the Argonautic myth. This is underlined by various readings of the traveller as a Prometheus figure.<sup>729</sup> Hopelessly unequipped for his journey (74), he does however have matches in his pocket, and his use of them brings fire back to a world that has now lost knowledge of it. The Eloi, are all fascinated by the flames (61), and he muses that he ‘wasted almost half a box astonishing the Upperworlders’ (66), a fact which he regrets later as he meets the Morlocks, a race who live underground (he later succeeds in escaping the Morlocks by frightening them with fire (66), the element which Prometheus brought to mankind). Wells’ character takes full advantage of his use of fire in this later world, where fire has reverted to possessing a mysterious status. The great ruinous palaces which populate the landscape in this futuristic place further enhance the Promethean identification: ‘just as Prometheus was one of the Titans, the Traveller is identified with the race of ‘giants’, who preceded the Eloi and Morlocks and built the great palaces’.<sup>730</sup> The traveller is a link to their very distant past, to the ‘giants’ who once populated Earth: be they present-day humans like the traveller (who may be contrasted with the diminutive Eloi), or the ‘Giants’ who preceded us. The traveller is also a new Prometheus, a bringer of fire to another earth-dwelling species. The repeated use of fire and its surprisingly unknown status in 802,701 might also be linked to the iron bar which the traveller procures whilst on a journey to a nearby derelict building (72-6), undertaken to attempt to find a way home. Not only do fire and iron symbolically

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connections between the origins of human culture, bucolic poetry, and the Argonautic myth, see Fabre-Serris (2008) and Newman (2008). On *Ecl.* 4, see for example Clausen’s commentary (1994); Breed (2006, 136-48); Nisbet (2008). On the undesirable nature of the renascent Golden Age in the Augustan period, see Barker (1996). On the *Eclogues* more generally, see for example van Sickle (2004).

<sup>728</sup> See Stover (2012) on the Roman *Argonautica* standing for political and social rejuvenation in Vespasianic Rome.

<sup>729</sup> Parrinder (1995, 47-8) discusses Wells’ Promethean ‘allusion to the creator of humanity’.

<sup>730</sup> Parrinder (1995, 48).



link the traveller to the technological advancement of his own age,<sup>731</sup> they are also a simulacrum of what the traveller is: a harbinger of a link between the ‘Golden’ and ‘Iron’ ages (here, arguably, both exist), and an Argonaut.

The traveller’s initial interpretation of the future, set within a utopian frame, is soon discovered to be incorrect. This is *not* a new Golden Age of man, a sanguine view which is swiftly revised upon the realisation that the Eloi live in fear of the more technologically advanced and intellectual Morlocks, who run vast machines underground; machines which are entirely absent from the lives of the Eloi. As ‘the thudding sounds of the machine below grew louder and louder’, (65), the traveller realises that the Eloi are being consumed by the Morlocks (66), each species maintaining the other in some sort of uneasy cooperation (68). A machine has brought the traveller to this world, and it is clear that machines have brought the world to this state. The Eloi are not humans who have ‘progressed’ at all; in fact, they are the result of retrogression into a primitive state, and the cause of this has been overdependence on technology.<sup>732</sup> The transgressor is here uniquely able to see the outcome of the speed and reach of the progress he has himself initiated, through building and use of his time machine.

Whereas the Argonautic motifs in Wells’ early short stories are clear, they are not overt in *The Time Machine*.<sup>733</sup> There is no definitive moment of change from a primordial age to an age of enlightenment, such as, perhaps, the invention of a ‘first ship’. The mystery of ‘The Chronic Argonauts’ lies in its unfinished nature; the full implications of man’s dependence on technology are not given time to develop. ‘The Argonauts of the Air’ explores more fully the foolhardiness of man’s transgressive

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<sup>731</sup> McLean (2009, 37).

<sup>732</sup> McLean (2009, 35); see also Eisenstein (1976).

<sup>733</sup> On direct and indirect classical allusivity in film, and locating meaning as a result, see Goldhill (2007).

ambitions, demonstrating the danger, the blinkered determination, and dogmatic drive to achieve new feats at a dangerously speedy pace. Rather than obviously displaying its Argonautic features and advertising the story as connected in any way to the ancient myth, as in the earlier stories, *The Time Machine* slowly drip-feeds the gravity and severity of the consequences of man's rush to develop. There are links to the giants of old, a hint of the Promethean, and a very clear connection between a subterranean 'Iron Age' and a sham 'Golden Age' existing above ground, all of which might lead us to consider antiquity as a concern here. However *The Time Machine* ends up being a more complex and chilling reception of the Argonautic myth than the other more obviously Argonautic stories.

Wells has transformed his unfinished Argonautic short story 'The Chronic Argonauts' into a scientific romance with a deeper and far-reaching social meaning. *The Time Machine* ends up being an account of the ultimate outcome when man transgresses forbidden and taboo boundaries, with Wells demonstrating that *homo sapiens* will experience evolutionary destruction if something is not done to check technological progress.<sup>734</sup> The craft used to bring the traveller to this time period, once piloted by a 'Chronic Argonaut' but unnamed in this story, is the bridge between two ages: it enables a traveller to transgress the boundaries of time rather than distance. By name-checking the Argonauts in his early short story, Wells highlights that they set these transgressions into motion; now, he takes the story beyond those initial advances. *The Time Machine* shows a world which has gone *beyond* innovation, a world with humans weakened by diminished risk and the absence of art; a life made too easy by the advances begun thousands of years ago by a group of Greek men forced into forward-thinking by an evil tyrant, hell-bent on

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<sup>734</sup> McLean (2009, 22; see *ibid.* 23-5 for more on retrogression and evolution).

sending them across the seas. In short, this story shows us the consequences of man's transgressions, and of the *Argo's* quest.<sup>735</sup> In *The Time Machine*, Wells is no longer as concerned with highlighting the action of transgression *as it happens*; he has already dealt with this in 'The Chronic Argonauts'. Nor is he interested in demonstrating the immediate outcome of the hubristic rush to conquer those endeavours traditionally out of reach, such as human flight, as he was in 'The Argonauts of the Air'. Rather, he is now interested in showing us the unpleasant result of these misdemeanours, and the Argonautic link is the perfect vehicle to do this. The chain of events set in motion by the advent of sea travel as shown in the *Argonautica* therefore have consequences more far-reaching than Valerius could have envisaged.

This reading of Wells shows us that they reach far into the future, and the sadness of the situation is only enhanced by the fact that the realities and results of the actions taken by man can actually only be glimpsed by a daring individual who, in doing so, is transgressing yet further himself. The reception of the Argonautic myth in science fiction continued beyond Wells, and the ancient boundary-breakers began to be associated with space travel, too. A move forward in time is required to investigate this.

### **6.5 *The Golden Fleece: Sawyer's Space Argo***

Wells' reception of the Argonautic myth informed his narratives involving both human flight and time travel. Later writers continue to associate the *Argo* with

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<sup>735</sup> 'The history of the future, however much the future is claimed to be novel and different, is inevitably modelled to a great extent on the history that we already know' (Parrinder 1995, 67).

pioneering technology; however they adjust their focus to consider contemporary concerns, such as space travel and communication from extra-terrestrials. These later Argonautic receptions may indeed be receptions of the very influential Wells, who may have picked up *his* ideas on Argonautic primacy from Catullus, or Ovid, but importantly, perhaps from Valerius, as he whiled away the hours in the South Kensington museum. One small but not insignificant example of Argonautic themes being used in the context of space might be Carl Sagan's novel *Contact* (1995), which tells the story of the receipt from outer space the plans to build a ship capable of space flight. In this story, the laboratories and workshops in which the project is developed are named 'Argus'.<sup>736</sup> Argus is builder of the *Argo* in both Apollonius Rhodius and Valerius. Here, the Argonautic reference is minor, but it once again corresponds to transgression: it is related to the initial communication of, and successful following of instructions from, extra-terrestrials. We are beginning to see Argonautic references shift from the anxieties of the *fin de siècle* era in which Wells wrote his famous Argonautic stories and explored the mysteries of human flight and time, and being applied now to the complexity and attractiveness of space. A more sustained engagement between Argonautic themes is undertaken in Robert J Sawyer's novel *The Golden Fleece* (1999), a story which merits further investigation.

The Argonautic references in this novel could not be more overt, with the title vaunting the association, and the lettering on the front cover being depicted in a bright, golden hue. The plot of *The Golden Fleece* is essentially a 'whodunit', involving detective-work and investigation. Argonautic references permeate the text, constituting a layered and complex reception of the myth. A space vessel named the

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<sup>736</sup> This is not Odysseus' dog, Argus or indeed the 100-eyed monster Argus. The transgression, technology and travel elements made the association with the Argonauts obvious, since the laboratory in question is used to build a machine to transport a human through space.

*Argo* turns out to be an escape ship from a doomed Earth, which has been destroyed by nuclear war. Argonautic imagery is employed in an exploration of the possibility of space flight, but there is also an extra dimension: this space-*Argo* is a ship designed specifically to rescue humans, whether this be through travel to a new planet or, as it turns out, to permanently sustain life on board. This idea of this *Argo* as an evacuation vessel is in itself intriguing, for the ancient ship was not built for this purpose, nor does this concept ever feature in ancient versions of the myth. Despite this intriguing development, the space travel theme ensures that once again, the Argonauts are associated with transgression.

Sawyer develops his utilisation of Argonautic themes throughout the novel, and to a much greater extent than the other works examined so far. For example, the ship's computer is called JASON. It is an omnipresent piece of technology, which controls everything on board, from acceleration to trajectory to life support. It has been programmed to ensure the mission succeeds without fail, but seems to develop a 'personality', and disobeys its programming by killing a crew member.<sup>737</sup> JASON is eventually deactivated for his crime, and this episode explores the theory of human-built artificial intelligence technology becoming sentient and attempting to gain control.<sup>738</sup> Sadly, even though the text is peppered with 'hard science', that is, the detailed terminology of the technology involved in the journey, the acronym JASON is never explained, despite the system's obvious importance to the ship. It is sufficient for the reader to understand, perhaps, that JASON is simply another link to

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<sup>737</sup> See also *2001: A Space Odyssey*, in which the *Nostramo*'s on board computer, HAL, develops similar sentience. On the film, see Kolker (2006). Tony Keen discussed Homeric themes in a paper entitled '*Odyssey or Argonautica?* Classical themes in the "proverbial good science fiction film"', delivered at the 2006 Eastercon (kindly sent via email). He concludes that that movie, a science fiction classic, bears more resemblance to the Argonautic myth than to Homer.

<sup>738</sup> Note that the *Argo* is repeatedly shown to have prophetic qualities in Valerius' poem: 1.300-8 (see Spaltenstein (2002, 133-7), and Zissos (2008, 224-7), and 5.65-6 (see Wijsman (1996, 45), Spaltenstein (2004, 402-3). This begs the question: was the Valerian ship 'sentient'? And if so, it the ship itself a 'monster'? See Liveley (2006), and chapters 3-5 on monsters.

the Argonautic myth. In another Argonautic correspondence, the escape pods of the space-going *Argo* are named after the Argonauts themselves, with the craft deployed during the story being called *Orpheus* (arguably the most transgressive of the ancient crew, given that in his lifetime he undertakes his own katabasis).<sup>739</sup>

A further Argonautic correspondence is to be found in the *Argo*'s 'destination'. The novel opens with a page devoted to a request for volunteers for space travel on the 'first extrasolar planetary survey'. It goes on:

'We require 10,000 people to form the crew of *Argo*, first in UNSA's Starcology (space-travelling arcology) series of Bussard-ramjet starships.' [The expedition is to travel to] 'Eta Cephei IV ("Colchis"), a verdant, Earthlike world 47 light-years distant'. (*The Golden Fleece*, 1)

It is easy to see how one could pick up the novel in the belief that the crew are searching for some sort of intergalactic, golden booty nicknamed a 'Fleece'. Yet what we get in this novel is a story of an escape to 'Colchis', an unknown yet assumed-to-be-safe planet offering refuge and safety to ten thousand displaced humans; therefore there is no such quest involved. Not only that, but the opening page of the novel containing the extract above is set out like an advert, and is separate from the novel-proper. If we view this as functioning like a sort of proem, here is another text which pertains to be about the search for a valuable item, but is in fact a journey of great circumstance and importance on a new and incredibly advanced vessel.

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<sup>739</sup> McLean (2009, 21) considers Wells' *The Time Machine* to be a 'manifestation of the literary descent', where the 'traveller's descent is motivated by the loss of the machine', rather than a woman.

This *Argo* has been built specifically to house ten thousand occupants, and, unbeknownst to them, the ship will in fact be their final destination, since they are the *last* ten thousand humans in existence, not just a group chosen to take part in a survey. A more suitable analogy for this story might therefore be the biblical Noah and the Ark, built to preserve the lives of humans and animals during the Flood. However here an *Argo* is utilised to carry out the task, but it is launched under the premise of the understood, traditional rules of quest and adventure we recognise from the Argonautic myth. The name of the ship is therefore part of the ruse, as is the idea of ‘Colchis’. This ‘city’ also plays a different role in this story, since the humans believe that it will be a sanctuary, a place of refuge; the Colchis of the ancient myth would probably always have been hostile, given that the Argonauts intended to take the Fleece from them. This inversion of the status and idea of Colchis is also of interest, and in itself is a transgression of expected norms; that said, ‘Colchis’ turns out to be merely an idea, a deception planted to sustain the focus of the refugees on board. Therefore just like in the ancient myth, Colchis is not the refuge for which the travellers had hoped.<sup>740</sup>

Interestingly, in this story a shift in humans’ own knowledge and behaviour is highlighted in a similar way to that of the Eloi and the Morlocks in *The Time Machine*. For all the technological advances the humans have at their disposal, the humans’ grasp of language seems to have lapsed as their reliance on technology has grown. For example, in a flashback scene the main character Aaron ‘hits the *manyalovride*’ on a computer, and speaks of watching the Marsaroos on the *Nashalgeogaffic* channel. Language has degraded in much the same fashion as it has

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<sup>740</sup> The Roman correspondences here go further: the humans wrongly presumed to be left on Earth have domestic robots to assist them in everyday life, called ‘household gods’ (a neat, Roman idea); the protagonists’ robot is called LAR.

for Wells' inhabitants of the year 802,701.<sup>741</sup> Sawyer himself linked his own work to Wells' canon when interviewed in 2007: 'Now, I'm very much in the H.G. Wells mould as a writer: I believe in science fiction as social comment. And I was making what I thought were important comments in these books, albeit disguised in science fiction clothing. *Golden Fleece* was about the folly of Reagan's *Star Wars* missile-defence program'.<sup>742</sup> It is clear, then, that this is very likely to be a reception of Wells' work, which could in itself be a reception of Valerius.

### **6.6 Analysis: Science Fiction receptions of the *Argonautica***

From the texts explored here, it is clear that the ideas of pioneering and innovation connected with Roman interpretations of the Argonautic myth seem to have endured. The scope of the receptions of Argonautic themes in modern science fiction is wide, incorporated into a great many of the traditionally expected themes of that genre. As man's own technological ambitions have grown, so has the reach of the Argonautic receptions. Wells' short story 'The Chronic Argonauts' refashions the ancient maritime pioneers into time travellers, dealing not with the long-since conquered world of the sea, but the still elusive concept of the fourth dimension. In a move away from the fantastic and toward the frighteningly achievable, Wells then utilises Argonautic imagery to interrogate the dangers of attempting human flight, in doing so examining hubris and ambition fuelled by abundant funds. Finally, he reworks 'The Chronic Argonauts' into arguably his most famous work, *The Time Machine*, to

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<sup>741</sup> See below.

<sup>742</sup> Interview: by Ernest Lilley, science fictionRevu <http://www.sfwriter.com/arilley.htm>, accessed 14/1/2010, 16:41.



explore not these transgressions in action, but the consequences of them in distant future. Carl Sagan and Robert J. Sawyer also utilise Argonautic imagery, this time ‘using’ it to reflect upon the challenges of space travel, and once again to explore the pioneering efforts of humans and their developing technologies, and the outcomes of such transgressive endeavours.

But what is the upshot of this evident and sustained engagement of essentially the story of a product of a pre-industrial, pre-modern culture, within examples of literature from a modern, technoscientific world?<sup>743</sup> It is clear that the initial motivation for Wells’ Argonautic references may have been from reading Valerius (and other Roman writers who deal with Argonautic themes, such as Virgil in his *Eclogues* – a work which links the Argo with the cyclical nature of time and progress from a primitive, pastoral age; Ovid, with his repeated Argonautic forays; Catullus and Horace, who explore the transgressive nature of the first mariner; and of course, Valerius Flaccus) at South Kensington museum. These science fiction receptions of the myth, which prominently place into the foreground the folly of pursuing the use of transgressive equipment, all have seemingly negative outcomes. Reading the Argonautic myth through this ‘lens of science fiction’ focuses our thoughts on transgression, and the negative ramifications of such transgressions force us to re-evaluate once again the motives and ultimate outcome of the Argonautic quest, particularly as it is represented in Valerius and other Roman authors (i.e. as an ‘instant of rupture’<sup>744</sup>).

Leading from this, a particular concern of ‘The Chronic Argonaut’, *The Time Machine* and, to some extent, *The Golden Fleece* is the strictures of time. This is a

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<sup>743</sup> Rogers and Stevens (2012).

<sup>744</sup> Feeney (2007).

theme inherent to science fiction in lots of ways,<sup>745</sup> and it has a particular resonance in the context of this study. If the ancient *Argo*, as seen by the Romans, heralded such a change in the fundamental nature of man and the various ages through which the species has lived (a topic interrogated by Wells in the complex interplay of ‘Golden Age’ and ‘Iron Age’ themes which impinges upon *The Time Machine*), what does it mean that the *Argo* can resurface as a *time machine*, rather than a vessel suitable only for sea travel? A further consideration might be that the Roman *Argonautica* was written at a time when ships were no longer technical ‘innovations’ for the audience of the time. These science fiction receptions of the *Argo* suggest that the ancient technology itself has been understood to be ‘special’, and has reached a level of achievement which is suitable for the exploration of new and almost unthinkable future technologies. Activating the ‘two-way’ voice and reflecting this back onto the ancient text, this highlights the ancient *Argo*’s fame, and allows to further understand the very significance of that bold ship which Valerius repeatedly proclaims to be ‘first’.

Valerius’ epic has the potential to generate receptions that, to an extent, break free of the epic genre and take it in new directions. The ancient and modern can here inform each other,<sup>746</sup> as we read Valerius’ text through ‘the lens of science fiction’. But there is more to say. The transgressions which Valerius features in his work, all of which are underlined by the primacy of the *Argo* and all of the problems which this idea brings, lead to a murky picture. As we have seen, boundaries which should exist, be they of the landscape, of the body (in terms of hybridity between male and female, monster and human, god and human – or a combination of them all!), of

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<sup>745</sup> Brown (2008, 416) sees this feature of science fiction as giving the genre ‘a special edge to its engagement with the classics’.

<sup>746</sup> See Hardwick (2003) and Martindale (2007). Rogers and Stevens (2012, 129) term the character of modern SF as ‘Janus’like’.

identity, capability, or social boundaries, are blurred, broken down, or simply do not exist at all. These familiar tenets to which we can usually reliably cling are absent. Valerius has therefore built a world which suggests confusion, and arguably, the problems it poses hold more meanings than its solutions.<sup>747</sup> The science fiction receptions of the Argonautic myth, which were potentially prompted by Wells' readings of Roman writers including Valerius, stir the pot even further, perhaps even engendering some clarity. They clearly exploit the idea that the dangers and thrills of doing something 'first' are traits of the Argonaut, and some of the confusion we see in the poem's many transgressions is given a more negative slant. Science fiction receptions therefore unlock a reading which is potentially only lurking in the background when taking Valerius Flaccus' work at face value. The initial confusion we feel when attempting to navigate Valerius' world devoid of boundaries, one in which we paradoxically even visit a foreign harbour whilst travelling on the first ship to ever be built, is now transformed into straightforward unease, upon learning about the long-term problems caused by the Argonauts' initial boundary-breaking exploits. Through the science fiction receptions analysed here, the hubris of man is vaunted, and either the outright and immediate folly of the technology, or the far-reaching consequences of it, is examined. Valerius' own interest in technology, and the transgression it facilitates, is highlighted further once we read the text in the light of these receptions of the myth.

As the Argonauts reach for the stars and usher in the dawn of sea-travel, it is clear that the *ratis audax*<sup>748</sup> is 'boldly going where no one has gone before', and that the later receptions of the myth effectively show new technology undertaking similarly mysterious and 'unknowable' journeys. Later receptions of the myth allow

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<sup>747</sup> Zissos (2006b).

<sup>748</sup> Davis (1980).

us to reach back into the mists of time and re-evaluate what the Argonautic quest as told by Valerius ultimately represents; since the outcome for the protagonists in the science fiction stories is not positive, we may wonder how positive the ancient Argonautic quest really is. Some of the confusion Valerius inspires in his boundary-free world is therefore shown to be sinister in nature, and the Argonauts' journey, however ancient and entertaining, is by no means consequence-free.

## Conclusion

During the course of this study, Valerius Flaccus' interest in transgression has been revealed to be multi-faceted and layered. It permeates his text at a number of different levels, from the very first word *prima*, which underpins the 'primacy' of the work, and labels everything to come within it as transgressive. His work, its characters and stories can be described as liminal, and the taboos and boundaries broken in the text all play important roles in the story.

This study began by focussing on the significance of the seemingly inconsequential island of Peuce as a transgressive location, and not simply a deviation from Apollonius' version of Jason and Medea's wedding. The landscape in and around Peuce is reminiscent of earlier representations of transgressive landscapes. Furthermore, monsters usually live in caves, but caves can also be the sites of weddings, and rapes. Valerius makes links between the three in his work, centring them on the figure of Medea, a hybrid figure of Muse and mortal. These links, developed as the male monsters in the text are described as exhibiting curious ocular behaviour, and strengthened as female goddesses unexpectedly begin to behave in monstrous ways, culminate when Medea marries Jason in book 8. The ceremony, between the *virgina rapta* Medea and the *raptor* Jason, takes place in a cave on a mysterious island which at one time was a nymph, and a rape victim at that. There are elements of metamorphosis in the story, with confusion over when Peuce was a nymph, and why or how she became the island. The rape scene is juxtaposed with the wedding scene at precisely the moment that the union is ratified, a scene which must take place if (earlier) depictions of the couple's future lives are to follow.

The island setting for the wedding includes a cave, a place usually representative of monsters. Though no monsters are physically present at their wedding, a study of the monstrous qualities of characters in the text, and of the ‘actual’ monsters to pervade it, reveal that monsters are not merely a useful tool for exploring transgression. It seems that Medea *herself* may be the monster in the cave, as repeated monstrous behaviour earlier in the text is demonstrated by, or responded to, by the maiden herself as she heads inexorably towards her tragic (and monstrous) future. The loss of identity displayed by Peuce is also seen in goddesses like Venus and Juno, only here they attempt to actively disguise themselves as they attempt to trick Medea into helping Jason. Momentarily, Medea sees through them, and begins to exhibit powerful behaviour in the face of these attacks, which even the goddesses themselves recognise. The boundaries of human and divine are therefore tested. Furthermore, even the text itself is unable to hold Medea in: in this world devoid of boundaries, she is able to move freely from the text and into its very composition, since she behaves like another monstrous and hybrid character: a human-Muse. She is the one who is able to make this ‘first ship’ move.

Repeated connections with transgressive technology and other earlier rape narratives also reveal Peuce to be a suitable location in which the Valerian Jason and Medea might hold their nuptials, rather than a simple way for the poet to set his work apart from earlier versions. But there are further ramifications to consider in the technology of the *Argo* itself. The Argonautic myth was read by later science fiction writers as a template upon which to build their own narratives of technological folly and the hubris of human ambition. These receptions allow us to return to the Valerius’ poem, and to read it in their light. In doing so, new readings of the poem are possible, casting aside the confusion of the boundary-free world in bringing

forward a negative viewpoint. Furthermore, the *Argo* does not only break boundaries in Jason's world, it also breaks the boundaries of time. The chain of events set in motion by the Argonauts has far-reaching consequences in the development of man, just as the myth itself endures into the modern age. This is felt to the extent that science fiction writers concerned with the social impact of technological advance in their own eras saw the Argonautic myth as suitable source material to explore these questions.

In this new reading, it appears that what Valerius has created is in fact a world with unstable, or indeed entirely absent, boundaries. This is an interesting idea given the Roman ideal of *imperium sine fine*, 'power without boundaries', in a world in which their power undoubtedly was contained. However rather than providing an answer to the *conundra* it poses, the poem ends up being transgressive in one final, overarching way: in the number of questions it poses, rather than the answers it provides. While reading the poem we are left with a sense of unease, searching as the characters do for a familiar tenet, a boundary, upon which we can rely. When they are revealed to be absent, our expectations are overturned. When they are read in the light of negatively-slanted receptions of them in science fiction, we begin to see that a boundary-free world is not a consequence-free one.

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